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*"We work in the dark -
we do what we can -
we give what we have.
Our doubt is our passion and
our passion is our task.
The rest is the madness of art."*

- Henry James

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The Continuing Saga of Dr. Iguana *The Story So Far*



by Ken Burke

Road Manager School: Day One

Hi, I'm Professor R.D. Warrior. Welcome to your first day at Road Manager School. Have you all paid your tuition? Filled out your forms so you can get class credit? Good.

OK, let's get right to it. There are many ins and outs of being a road manager for either a touring rock star or country performer, but they can all be boiled down to two simple pieces of advice.

1. Get the drunk on the bus.
2. Get the drunk off the bus.

Questions?

"Professor Warrior, what if the performer is touring by air?"

Then you change it to: "Get the drunk on the plane, and get the drunk off the plane." Yes, you in the back.

"What if the performer you work for doesn't drink, but is a big pillhead?"

Then the advice is: "Get the pillhead on the bus, and get the pillhead off the bus."

"What if the star you work for injects heroin?"

Then the advice changes to: "Get the junkie on the bus, and get the junkie off the bus."

"What if they're getting freaky with a bunch of groupies?"

Then it's: "Get the slutmonger on the bus, get the slutmonger off the bus." Look people, this is pretty simple stuff.

(Disruption in classroom. Emotional student speaks out.)

"Why do they have to be drunks and pillheads? Why can't they be nice, clean-living people who just happen to be more talented than the rest of us? Why do you insist on characterizing these wonderful performers who do so much to enrich our lives as drunks, pillheads, junkies, and slutmongers?"

Just calling a spade a spade, kid.

"Well, my brother just signed a big contract with Universal, and he's not a dooper, drinker, or a slutmonger. We're family, and he's promised me and our mom that he won't change a bit."

Good for you, sweetheart. (Class laughs.) Look, no one knows why nature, God, or whatever gave some people good looks, charisma, and talent, whereas other people - like you - got squat. But let me tell you this: no matter what their intentions are, no one goes into show business for the express purpose of being a stand-up guy who lives a

clean and wholesome life. They could do that at home, so what would be the point?

No, they enter showbiz so they can become big stars, make a lot of money, and have a ready-made excuse for being a world-class pain in the ass!

"My brother is an honorable man and a great artist!"

You probably think that because you've turned a blind eye to a lot of crap he's already pulled. How long have you been his personal manager, road manager, and go-fer?

"About six years now. He trusts me, and I trust him."

Of course he trusts you. He trusts you to not get wise to what he's been doing behind your back.

"What do you mean?"

How many girlfriends have unexpectedly broke up with you since your brother began performing?

"Uh...uh...about a dozen, why?"

How many have gotten pregnant, but said you weren't the father?

"Uh...about half, why?"

Kid, it's statistically impossible for that to happen without a mitigating factor. In this case, the odds are that your brother has knocked up every one of your girlfriends, and you're too wrapped up in this personal loyalty bullshit to figure it out.

"Th-that's just not..."

Are your folks divorced?

"Yeah, but what's..."

Did your dad remarry?

"Yeah, but what's..."

Did your dad say that after the divorce and child support payments that he wasn't going to have any more kids?

"Yeah, he said he was going to get a vasectomy, but..."

But your stepmother got pregnant anyway?

"Yeah...how did you know?"

Congratulations on becoming an illegitimate uncle, kid.

"That's a dirty lie! Why would my brother even do something like that?"

Because he can! Look, the same magic

chemistry that allows him to create the music that moves millions of listeners to ecstasy, also compels your brother to seduce every piece of tail within bedding distance. It has probably become a bit of a game for him, and the more personally dangerous that game is, the better. Let me ask you something. What's the silliest "emergency" he ever sent you out on?

"Uh...a few months ago, we had dinner at my dad's place, and he got all hysterical about getting Milk Made Original Sour Cream for his baked potato, and he sent both me and my dad back to our old neighborhood, about forty-five minutes away, to get some."

Was it sometime after the "Sour Cream" incident that your stepmother revealed that she was pregnant?

(Defeated.) "Yes."

There you go.

(Kid sobs.)

Let me explain something. Right now your brother - the performer with the multi-million dollar contract - gets a sharp, sneaky thrill from fucking your girlfriends and your stepmom behind your back. He knows damn well he's doing wrong, but he just can't help himself. Then, something positive happens. Caving in to that sharp, sneaky thrill causes him to feel pangs of profound guilt, which eventually translate into great songwriting, soulful singing, and brilliant guitar work.

"He has been extraordinarily prolific lately."

Sure he has. But eventually, seducing the girlfriends, wives, and brothers of his closest friends and family members won't be dangerous enough. The adrenaline will stop kick-starting his testosterone because he'll be bored. He'll stop feeling that sharp, sneaky thrill, and, what's worse, he'll stop feeling the pangs of guilt. It'll kill something deep inside of him if he doesn't create, so he then has to find another way to get the same feeling. So then he'll turn to booze, and that'll work for a while. But then it won't. Then he'll get into drugs, and that'll work for a while. But then it won't. Rehab will work the first few times. Then it won't. Naturally, no musician who

ever lived has the strength of character to quit booze or drugs forever without turning on to something worse, so he'll end up an alcohol-soaked, drug-addicted has-been who can't get it up or get it off anymore.

"Oh no!"

Eventually, the "star" figures out that the only pleasure he has left comes from denying all his lifelong fans his on-stage presence. Soon, if he's not blowing off shows, he's hiding in his dressing room, refusing to leave the bus, or locking himself into an airplane men's room.

"Oh God, Larry did that last week."

Of course he did. And if he doesn't do his show, not only does the star not get paid, but hundreds of other people, from technicians and janitors to vendors and ticket sellers, are thrown out of work. Soon, your "artist" gets a reputation as unreliable and, before you know it, he's an unemployable alkie with a drug problem, writer's block, and a limp dick - and it's all your fault because you didn't get the drunk off the bus!

(Class gasps and then applauds a classic "teachable moment.")

That's not all. Then *Rolling Stone*, or some other music tabloid pretending to be a real news magazine, will write that management problems derailed the greatest career this side of the Beatles. Soon, even people who know better will start believing the story and calling you a crook, an asshole, or even worse...Allen Klein. So you can't win.

(Crying.) "I-I'll just quit."

I can see the headline in *Rolling Stone* now: "My career tanked because my own brother stopped believing in my music."

"But what about me?"

What about you? Nobody cares about you. Your ego is going to take a savage beating because you're doing piss work for someone who will never be your moral or intellectual equal. You'll never know if people are befriending you or running a con because they want to get close to your brother. You'll have to let people think you're the druggie, the alcoholic, the sex addict, the con man, and the liar, so the public will continue to see

him as the fair-haired boy.

"That's not fair! What can I do?"

Just wipe your nose, stop your blubbering, and keep your mouth shut, kid. Your brother is going to be a talented, self-aggrandizing dickhead no matter who his road manager turns out to be. However, there is an upside.

"What's the upside?"

The upside is: you can actually take care of your stupid-ass brother. You can make sure that his whiskey is watered down, that his drugs of choice aren't too pure, and that grasping gold-diggers don't hang around too long or go unchecked for disease.

(Sniffs back tears.) "I guess that's true."

And there's something else, in case you're wondering about the back end. Drunk, whore-mongering junkies like your brother are pretty sloppy businessmen, especially during their early years. You can skim merchandising dough off the top, slip him papers that give you a piece of his publishing rights, and secretly get ownership of his life story and image rights without him even knowing it. Then, after the bloated, self-centered wastoid dies, you can clean up by licensing tribute shows about the "artist," and writing a phoney-baloney book about what a swell brother he was.

(Regains composure.) "I-I could write a book?"

That's right. And license merchandise, control his songwriting royalties, likeness rights, and collect large speaking fees at fan festivals all over the world! But none of it will happen for you if you don't learn the two basic rules. Everyone say them with me now.

(Class, including the former complainer, chant in unison as the Professor points to the rules on the chalkboard.)

"1. Get the drunk on the bus!"

"2. Get the drunk off the bus!"

Great! Any more questions? You with the glasses.

"Professor, what if teleportation, like they have on *Star Trek*, is perfected?"

Then it's: "Get the drunk into the teleporter, and get the drunk out of the teleporter." Nice to see somebody thinking

ahead for a change.

Any more questions?

This piece was inspired by a chat I had with Johnny Vallis. Recently, a band asked our favorite Canadian entertainer/tribute artist if he would manage their fledgling career. Vallis thanked them but turned down

the offer. I asked if he had ever managed a band before. "No," he told me, "but I could." "Because of all your years in the business?" I asked. "Yes," he replied before adding, "plus, I know how to get the drunk off the bus."

Thank you, Johnny.



Heino's *Liebe Mutter...* EMI Columbia. Album cover credits: photos: Trawinski.

The X-phile (#1)

By Michael J. Varhola

Several years ago, I was getting ready to climb the highest mountain in the “Lower 48” United States and went to an REI store in Northern Virginia to buy some of the gear I would need. When I got there, the doughy sack of turds who waited on me immediately began throwing around all sorts of technical terms I couldn’t understand. When he saw that I didn’t know what he was talking about, he apparently decided I wasn’t worth dealing with as a customer and assumed a very unhelpful demeanor. Mind you, this fat douchebag had probably never climbed anything higher than a stepstool to get a bag of chips off the top of the fridge, but because I couldn’t understand his mountain fairy dialect, he assumed a moral high ground and treated me like I was the poser.

This episode went a long way toward helping me to understand some of the attitudes I ended up dealing with when, in late 2007, I began writing travel guides to haunted places for the *America’s Haunted Road Trip* series – first *Ghosthunting Virginia*, and then *Ghosthunting Maryland*. This allowed me to pursue professionally something I had already been doing to one extent or another for about three decades.

What I found when I undertook ghosthunting as public, rather than private, pursuit was that far more people than I ever imagined had become involved in the pursuit,

inspired for the most part by the wave of television shows dedicated to it. What was even more surprising to me, however, was the uniformity of their attitudes, motivations, methodologies, and vocabularies — which, generally, slavishly followed those of the “professional” ghosthunters they were watching on television shows. Back in the day, what is now called ghosthunting had been undertaken only by a tiny minority who had to figure out just about everything on their own, relying on things like the limited number of relevant texts that were available, and comparing notes with fellow investigators. Today, the number of people involved in ghosthunting is phenomenally larger, but most of them are simply uncritically mimicking the actions they have seen others perform, and do not feel the need to actually think for themselves.

So to say that I have mixed feelings about the current state of “ghosthunting” in particular, and paranormal investigation in general, would certainly be an understatement, and I think a great deal that is both positive and negative can be found in them today.

Pros of the phenomena include that it has allowed people to feel more comfortable discussing their own paranormal experiences than they might have in previous years; that the pursuit has been democratized and

vitalized by the inclusion of so many people; and that more tools and practical information now exist and are more readily available than ever before.

Cons include that the relatively new phenomena of ghosthunting has become overly standardized; that it has in many peoples' minds been dissociated from the broader field of the supernatural, which has certain dangers associated with it; and that too many people pursue ghosthunting as if it were comparable to a mundane activity like paintball or geocaching.

Television shows and other media devoted to ghosthunting and paranormal investigation have, of course, contributed to both the upsides and downsides of the pursuit.

It may well be that you have considered attempting ghosthunting or some other sort of paranormal investigation. If so, here are a few pieces of advice based on my own experience that might make such an endeavor more productive and enjoyable for you:

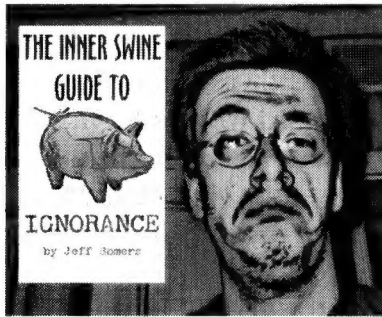
* Don't fixate on equipment (which I once inadvertently offended one ghosthunting chick by referring to as "toys"). One reason the Germans and other technologically-oriented nations almost always lose at war is that they are fixated on paraphernalia and other bullshit, and do not understand that flesh always trumps steel. If you want to use equipment, that's fine, but remember two things: the equipment alone is not enough to achieve success, and the lack of it is not a reason to not get involved in this pursuit. Speaking personally, I generally use a flashlight, a digital camera, and sometimes a microcassette recorder or MP3 player in the course of my investigations, and, depending on your needs, you could certainly use less or more (e.g., EMF meters, thermometers). In any event, your mind is your most important tool, and the only one for which there is no electronic or mechanical substitute.

* Don't make "proving" anything your biggest priority. Skeptics and even other investigators will sometimes challenge

others' experiences by claiming that they don't prove anything. Well, they don't need to. Your ghosthunting and paranormal investigations should be about personal growth and improvement. If it is all about proving things to other people...well, it probably isn't going to work anyway. What you experience should be meaningful primarily to yourself; secondarily to your friends and loved ones, who presumably trust you to at least some extent; and least of all, or not at all, to the world at large.

* Don't be a dick. It is amazing the lack of respect many paranormal investigators show to everyone around them, including property owners and the spirits of the dead. Approach this pursuit with the good manners that it warrants, and avoid "ghost-baiting," wrecking other peoples' stuff, or making light of the people – living or dead – who you may be interacting with. I can't promise that anything bad will happen to you if you don't follow this last bit of advice...but I certainly hope it does.

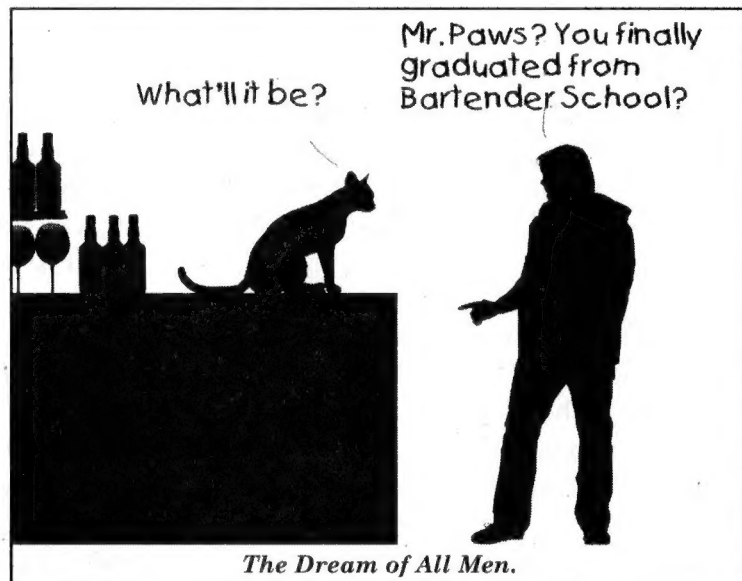
That's it for now! Hopefully, this will all help you find your own way into, through, and back out of the unseen world. Keep your eye on this space in *Brutarian* for more hands-on information about the paranormal, the occult, and the just-plain weird. And feel free to touch base with me at ghosthunting@varhola.com to share your own thoughts about this and related subjects!



The Inner Swine Guide to Ignorance by Jeff Somers

Episode Nine: Defeated by Ignorance

Every now and then I'm startled from a particularly good nap and I think that I really ought to be able to make some money from my writing abilities. I mean, it's the one damn skill I was given by the universe. I'm no athlete; the last time I ran anywhere without a bear chasing me was decades ago. I'm no scientist, unless you count my ongoing experiments in teaching cats to speak and tend bar - but considering the fact that my methods are not what most would consider "scientific," I doubt that counts. I'm no businessman, either; all of my book advances and film rights monies were invested in trying to extract my various inheritances from well-meaning Nigerian officials. I don't blame them. They were good, god-fearing folk, and they tried their best.

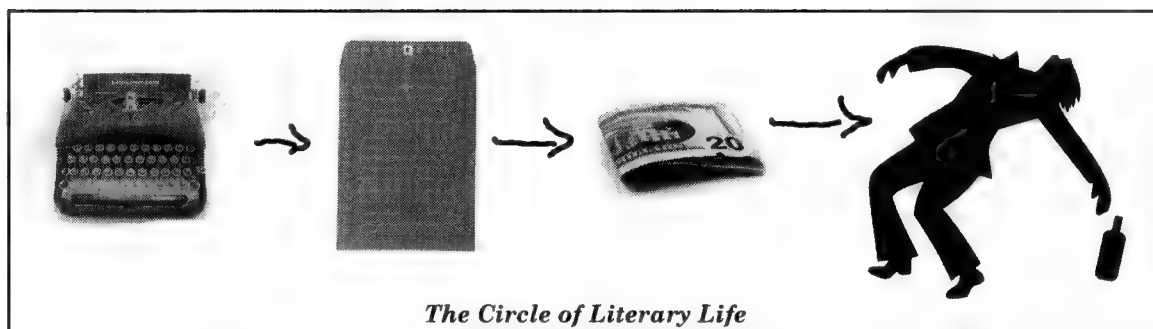


No, all I have is my writing, and sometimes I think I should be able to amass fortunes using it, as long as you define *fortunes* as hot dog money. The fact that so far this has not happened does not discourage me, for I am fortified with liquor and daydreams, and enough of the first makes the second almost seem real.

Still, my eye wanders, and sometimes I do things like search the Internet for freelance writing jobs. This one time I did that and through a series of miraculous events traceable directly to that Internet search, I sold my novel *The Electric Church*. As a result I expect something like that to happen each and every time I boot my computer. So I did a little searching the other day and saw an ad for a writing mill, which is basically a company that hires freelancers to write articles on a variety of topics in a fairly standard format, for low money and no credit. They had an application to fill out, so I decided to go ahead and fill it out, dreaming of writing columns and easy, no-research essays on things like Jeff's Favorite Booze, and What

Jeff Had for Lunch Today and How You Can Too.

The application asked for writing samples, so I purposefully sent them pieces from my zine *The Inner Swine* to make sure they knew that I wasn't particularly professional, research-prone, or apt to use spellcheck. When my application was approved I assumed this was some sort of occult contract where they would offer me vast sums in return for writing what I've already been writing for years - research-free gonzo opinion pieces drenched in my own brand of "humor." The pay is awful, so if you spend more than an hour working on each assignment you're screwing yourself, but I figured I'd find something in their assignments that I could knock off in ten minutes, then go and immediately spend my expected paycheck on more booze, thus continuing the circle of life.



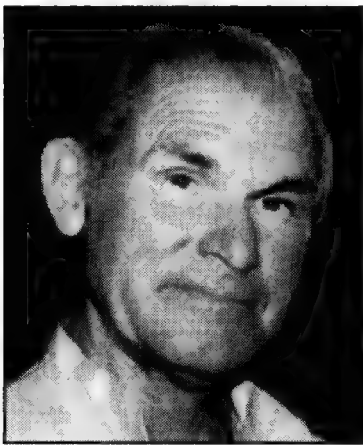
And then I logged onto the website and was horrified. There was absolutely nothing there I was even remotely qualified to write about. Nothing about drinking too much, or how I like to take a long walk in the afternoons, or having four cats. Nothing about my vague opinions on politics or obscure books I read fifteen years ago and have never found anyone else willing to discuss with me. It was shocking.

Every single subject would have required hours, if not days, of research for me to be able to, because I generally don't know anything about anything. How did they expect me to make easy money off of them if they insisted on giving me these dry, difficult subjects? I mean, if I wanted to work for a living I certainly wouldn't be trying to sell my writing. Several emails went unanswered, and sadly I had to walk away from this opportunity, and now the world will never know what great things I may have written if only I'd been allowed to write about things I already knew intimately. Which are limited to things I do and observe every day, of course, but trust me, that is a *fascinating* subset of data. You would be amazed at how interesting it is, especially when I put a bit of the English wizardry on it.

So, my master plan to earn easy cash was squashed by my apparent lack of any knowledge whatsoever. I mean, there wasn't a single subject there I could write about without having to go back to at least a two-year university program. While this is distressing, it's amazing to think that I *do*, in fact, have something of a writing career, despite the heavy burden of complete ignorance about just about everything. I've done so much with so little, it's kind of inspiring, in a way. As a matter of fact, it sounds like a great idea for a book that could be ghostwritten for me, wherein someone describes my triumphant, sassy refusal to let near-total ignorance force me to work at McDonald's for my entire life. I would split the proceeds ninety-ten with some enterprising kid who'd write the whole thing for me. No need for interviews. Just make up something using my name as the main character, and we're probably good to go.

Al Adamson

- Putting The A For Auteur Into The B-Movie



Introduction by
George R. Reis
With added material by
Dominick Salemi

Interview conducted by
George R. Reis and Keith J. Crocker

During the 60s many independent American directors came to promise, shooting various exploitation films of varying quality. Their subject matter was low-budget, drive-in fodder - great trashy films that could be viewed again and again. The list includes such notables as Herschell Gordon Lewis, Ted V. Mikelis, Ray Dennis Steckler, Jerry Warren, and David L. Hewitt.

For me, one man stands out from the rest. His films were better directed, better paced, and, most importantly, more entertaining than those made by the aforementioned. That man is Al Adamson. Adamson usually threw in everything but the kitchen sink into his films, most of which featured one or more of the following: horrifying creatures, rough biker gangs, mad scientists, deranged dwarves, scantily clad girls, long-fanged vampires, and whip-wielding feminists.

What more could you ask for?

Adamson most often utilized some of the best known - and beloved - B-movie character actors such as John Carradine, Lon Chaney, Jr., J. Carrol Naish, Angelo Rossitto, Kent Taylor, Scott Brady, Grant Williams, Yvonne DeCarlo, The Ritz Brothers, and Russ Tamblyn. Al also had a repertory troupe of sorts, one which included his wife Regina Carrol, the starlet of most of his outings. Sadly, Regina passed on in late 1992.

Adamson became partners with Sam Sherman, the head of Independent International Films. If he wasn't releasing foreign products - including several Paul Naschy features - Sherman was producing an Adamson film. Sometimes his pictures were made in bits and pieces over a period of years, making for great creative editing. Some of the amazing motion pictures Al made include *Psycho A Go-Go*, the epochal *Satan's Sadists*

and *Horror of the Blood Monsters*, a film that probably had more alternate titles than any other English-speaking movie.

We had the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Adamson on Halloween night in 1993. Sadly, this was to be one of the last feature-length interviews the man was to give as just two years later he was murdered. The perpetrator was a contractor living in Adamson's house. According to evidence adduced at the contractor's trial, Adamson was bludgeoned to death, most likely in his home, then had his corpse unceremoniously dumped in a hole in an adjacent room - the hole made by removing a jacuzzi - and subsequently covered with four tons of concrete and overlaid with tile. For filmmaker and former business partner Sam Sherman, the circumstances surrounding the death of his close friend seemed morbidly ironic, as Adamson's demise looked and sounded like something they might have come up with for one of their movies. "A man disappears, then he's found on his property, dead from blows to the head and entombed in cement - it's eerie," Sherman was quoted as saying after the contractor's conviction. Sherman went on to say that Adamson's death was a shame as "[Adamson] was a sweet, nice, hard-working person, and what was done to him was despicable."

BRUTARIAN: What was your first film?

AL ADAMSON: I did a film called *Halfway to Hell* with my father. It was made back in the late 50s. *The Man with the Synthetic Brain* was the next one.

BRUT: That became *Blood of Ghastly Horror*. Wasn't it originally called *Psycho A Go-Go*?

AA: Yes, originally it was *Psycho A Go-Go*. We added footage and released it as *The Man with the Synthetic Brain*, and then we added more footage and it became *Blood of Ghastly Horror*.

BRUT: The footage was from three different periods. How did you blend it all together?

AA: We seem to be masters at that. We can do those things and nobody even knows most of the time. To just give you an idea, we took a film called *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; it was made in Germany for a million dollars, which today is equivalent to twenty million dollars. It had Herbert Lom and Julliette Greco. We took that picture and we added forty-five minutes to it, intercut it, took some of the old footage out, released it, and the film played all over the United States. When they reviewed it, not one reviewer ever caught the fact that it was done at different times twenty years apart. Not only did they not do that, they praised the scene that I added, one of the dramatic scenes, as being one of the best scenes in the picture.

BRUT: What kind of footage did you add? Did you spice it up?

AA: Yes, we added more sex; we added more violence; we added a black and white romance, and it worked nice. It worked lovely. They never caught it.

BRUT: *Blood of Dracula's Castle* was your first teaming with John Carradine. How did you begin to acquire some of the older stars?

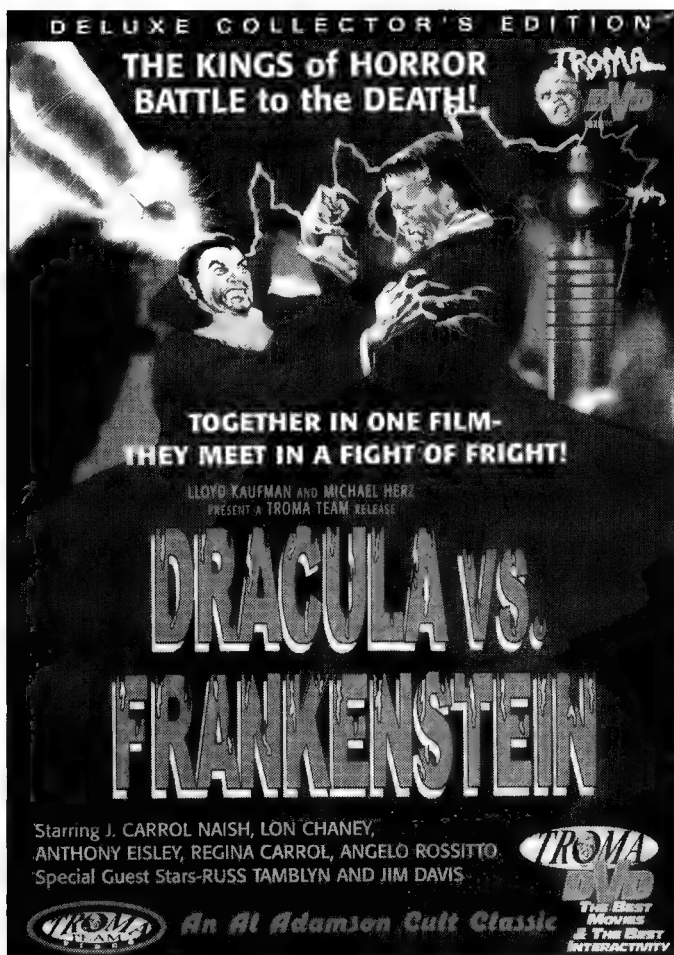
AA: Well, we liked to have the old pros in our pictures because they had a lot of class, and we needed their names to sell the films a lot of the time and make it more professional.

BRUT: Were you a fan of the old horror films of the 30s and 40s?

AA: Yes, a lot of them, not all of them, but a lot of them.

BRUT: What was Carradine like to work with?

AA: Fantastic! Best pro . . . best person . . . best actor I've ever worked with!



BRUT: *The first film you did with him started as The Blood Seekers, which became Dracula vs. Frankenstein. How did you combine the two?*

AA: Well, we started out making *Blood Seekers*, and for some reason, sometimes pictures just don't work, so you try a few things. Finally, we worked it out, and we added some other footage and it came out as *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*, and it's been a hit ever since.

BRUT: *How many years did it take to get Dracula vs. Frankenstein out?*

AA: About two years. We started in '69, and I think it was released in '71.

BRUT: *How was it working with Angelo Rossitto?*

AA: Angelo was great. He wasn't a great

actor, but his personality and size made him a great character, and he did his job.

BRUT: *Where did you shoot Brain of Blood?*

AA: *Brain of Blood* was shot in the Los Angeles area, a lot of it in the Topanga Canyon area.

BRUT: *That was for Hemisphere Pictures who are used to doing things in the Philippines. How did they come to hire you?*

AA: Sam Sherman had worked for Hemisphere Pictures for a while, and this was one year they didn't get a picture from the Philippines, and they needed a film to put out for the summer. So they gave us a deal and we went out and shot it.

BRUT: *You had a fellow in that movie called Zandor Vorkov, who also played Count Dracula in Dracula vs. Frankenstein. What was he like?*

AA: He was fine. He had some funny ideas of what he wanted to do with his life. He ended up in Santa Barbara last time I met with him, then I lost contact with him.

BRUT: *He didn't want to be an actor?*

AA: He did, but things weren't going right, and he was looking at other opportunities.

BRUT: *How did you get Forry Ackerman to appear in Dracula vs. Frankenstein?*

AA: Well, Sam Sherman had been a friend of Forry Ackerman for years, and Forry, like most, was a ham, wanting to be in pictures. He enjoyed it. We used the props he had for other films for *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*.

BRUT: *Sometimes your films become really brutal. There are a lot of gruesome effects in Brain of Blood, the brain transplant scene in particular. Were those effects, or did you use actual surgery footage?*

AA: No, we went down to the market and got some brains. You know, they sell brains from animals. It was just so simple. It really wasn't hard to do at all.

BRUT: Did you have a regular make-up man?

AA: Yes, he wasn't the greatest on that picture. I wasn't happy with the monster.

BRUT: Did you follow movie trends like "biker films"?

AA: Yes, whenever the motorcycle films were in, we'd do those. If horror was in, we'd do horror. If science fiction was in, we'd do that. We did other things, too, but we did follow the trends.

BRUT: I saw you on The Joe Franklin Show and you seemed to favor Satan's Sadists. Is that your favorite?

AA: Oh, it's one of the better films I've made. That and one called *Jessi's Girls* is another. It's a western. That's a good one.

BRUT: You appear to be more fond of your action films.

AA: I think that I'm a better action director than anything.

BRUT: Do you like doing horror films?

AA: I did like doing them. To me, it's fun. I don't take it seriously.

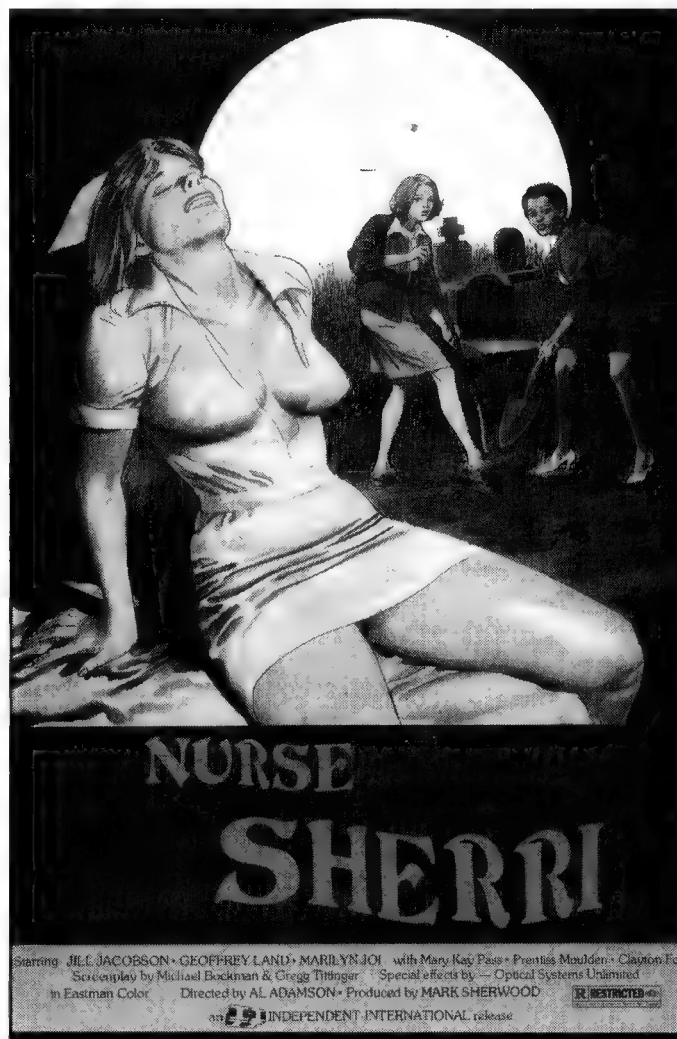
BRUT: Your films always had long titles that spelt out what the picture was about. Who was behind that concept?

AA: Well, we started a trend that's actually being used in many studio films today: a flashback at the end. You know, a flashback in the picture, either behind the titles, or in the case of *Brain of Blood*, it was used as an effect. That's where we first did it.

BRUT: We interviewed Russ Tamblyn, and he said that on *Satan's Sadists* he improvised a lot of his own lines and did some of his own bits of business in the film.

AA: I gave Russ a free hand; that's why he worked for me. He had retired pretty much at the time, and I found him. I said, "Look Russ, I want you to add what you can to the film." So in certain situations, I let him do what he wanted to do. He enjoyed that. That's why he always worked for me, because he was given that freedom. Although you can't improvise all the time; it can ruin a picture. Improvisation depends on the type of situation. You just can't do it with everybody in every situation. Even with Russ, I'd say, "Hey Russ, that don't work."

BRUT: Did you have to handle a lot of the technical work on your films, or was that in



other people's hands?

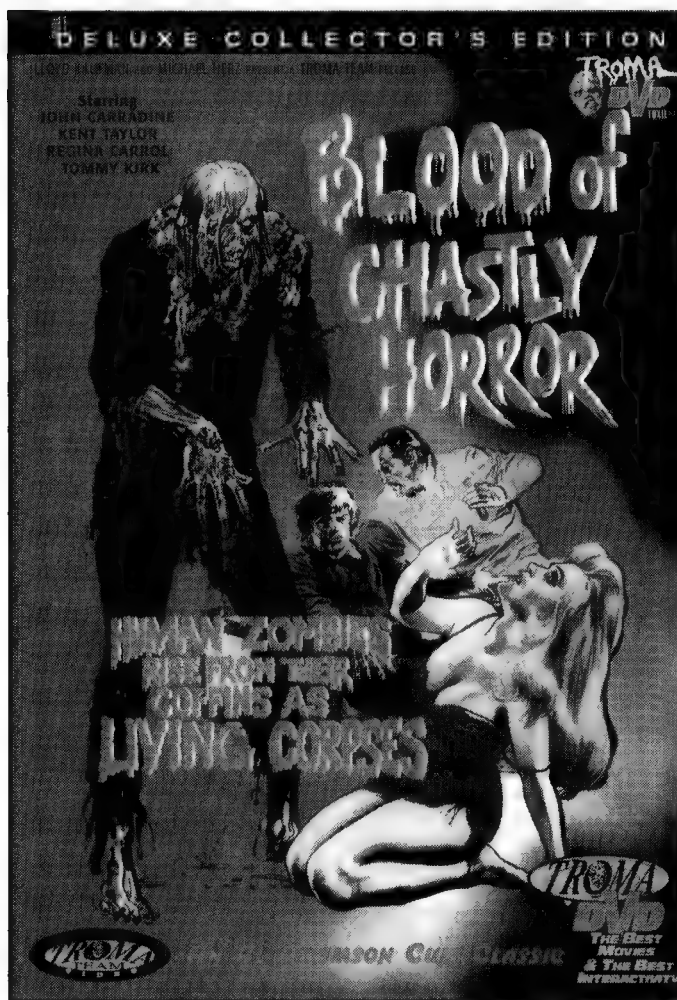
AA: The things I worried about most were having a good cameraman and a sound man. That's all I need: me. A cameraman and a soundman and I could go out and make a movie right now.

BRUT: What was the influence for Nurse Sherri?

AA: We did a take-off of *Carrie*, and Sam wanted a "nurse" picture. I think it's got one of the best last reels of any horror film. It just works: fright after fright after fright!

BRUT: We were all sad to hear about the death of Regina Carrol. She will remain a cult hero to many of us. What are your memories of her?

AA: Regina was a great dancer, a great



actress, and a wonderful person. She went through a lot of pain at the end. There wasn't much I could do about it aside from just being there for her. It's amazing; it's almost been one year now. She died on November 4th, 1992.

BRUT: Had she acted for you first, or had you already been married prior to working in films together?

AA: I used her as an actress in *Satan's Sadists*, and we started going together right after that. We actually didn't get married until '72. We had lived together before that for a couple of years.

BRUT: *Horror of the Blood Monsters* was an interesting film. Some of the footage is from a Philippine move. Does that film exist in its entirety anywhere?

AA: No! Well, it might have been in the Philippines but only in the Philippines. We bought that footage, and we added John Carradine, Robert Dix, and a few people like that. [In the film] we made our cast visit another planet, and then we added the tint because the new stuff was shot in color, and we tinted the stuff on the planet. Some of the stuff was really good, I thought. The snake people, the bat people, it was different. We couldn't afford to pay for those kinds of effects they had over there.

BRUT: Who did you get the footage from?

AA: It was from a guy in the Philippines who came over and had two or three pictures. I saw this one, and I saw the possibilities, so we bought it from him. I remember sitting in Utah, I had a ranch up in Utah, in the middle of the summer, and some people came over and said, "I think your film is on." So we went over to their house because we didn't even have a television, and here on a Sunday afternoon was that picture!

BRUT: You've worked with some of the best

cameramen around. Psycho A Go-Go had Vilmos Zsigmond.

AA: Right, and he also did *Blood of Dracula's Castle*. He split that with Laslo Kovacs. He did three pictures for me. Vilmos was one of the best, and then of course Kovacs. Then I used Gary Graver, who was Orson Welles' cameraman. The last one I used was Louis Horvath. He was another Hungarian in the same mold as Zsigmond and Kovacs. I've always been blessed with having good cameramen. As I say, "A cameraman, soundman and I could go make a movie."

BRUT: *Some of the actors in your films, Greydon Clark, and John Bud Cardos, became directors. Did you inspire them to direct?*

AA: Well, I'm sure they learned a lot from me. Greydon Clark did nothing but practically move in with me. He picked my brain and picked my brain until he was ready to go out there. Cardos was a different breed. He just wanted to be more powerful. I think Greydon is a better director than Cardos. Cardos was good as a production manager, and he was also a passable actor.

BRUT: *You had a stable of actors with whom you often worked, were you good friends with them?*

AA: We always had fun on our sets. We never had fights. We didn't have time for it. We were out there to make a film. We used a lot of the same people over and over again because they were dependable. They were reasonable price-wise as well. We had to watch those sorts of things. We would rather go with somebody that we knew. I had bad experiences two or three times in casting people that I thought were fine individuals. But the minute that camera rolled . . .

BRUT: *What was the general budget for your pictures?*

AA: We had budgets of usually \$200,000 to \$500,000. It depended on the pictures. Some had more production, some had more time to shoot. I know I didn't get rich. [laughs]

BRUT: *Did the older actors get along with the less experienced actors?*

AA: The older actors were always great. The younger ones left something to be desired. If they were smart, the younger ones would watch and listen to the older pros. You can't beat that experience; I don't care who or what you are.

BRUT: *On Blazing Stewardesses, The Three Stooges were slated to star. Did you ever meet them?*

AA: No, I talked to a couple of them over the phone, but I never met them. Sam was in contact with them. They were just too ill and too much trouble at the end of their career. I did talk to Moe on the phone; he was very sick.

BRUT: *Moe Howard died, so the Stooges were replaced by The Ritz Brothers. Were they a handful?*

AA: They were wonderful, and Harry Ritz remained our friend until the day he died. He was a fine man; I used to go to his house all the time.

BRUT: *Doctor Dracula was another film you shot footage for.*

AA: Yes, we acquired that film and added more footage to it. We got John Carradine, and we added more of the horror element to it. It worked.

BRUT: *With the drive-in dead or dying, where do you hope to see your latest film released?*

AA: Well, we planned on shooting it for television, and cable, and the foreign market.

But the thing is, we may have an alien. The film is about UFOs. We may have the body of a real alien! We saw pictures of it, but we're just not positive. If that happens, we are going to release the picture theatrically because it has footage that nobody, even the avid UFO fan, has never ever seen before. I went to Italy and shot stuff; I went to Australia and shot stuff. It's just going to blow everyone's mind if it comes out the way we want it to. It's called *Beyond This Earth*. Sam Sherman is producing.

BRUT: *What do you have planned next?*

AA: We're doing a sequel to the UFO film. Then we're going to do one called *Alien Landing*. From there it's on to Australia for *Gold Fever*, so that should keep us busy.

BRUT: *Are you bringing back any of the old gang?*

AA: Maybe Graver or Lou Horvath, one of the two as cameraman. It depends on where I shoot. I really don't know about the old gang. Most of them have gone to oblivion.

[This interview was originally published in the seminal zine The Exploitation Journal in slightly different form.]

THE FILMS OF AL ADAMSON

Psycho a Go-Go (1965)
The Female Bunch (1969)
Satan's Sadists (1969)
Blood of Dracula's Castle (1969)
Hell's Bloody Devils (1970)
Horror of the Blood Monsters (1970)
Five Bloody Graves (1970)
Dracula vs. Frankenstein (1971)
Brain of Blood (1972)
Blood of Ghastly Horror (1972)
Angels' Wild Women (1972)
Dynamite Brothers (1974)
Girls for Rent (1974)
Naughty Stewardesses (1975)
Jessi's Girls (1975)
Blazing Stewardesses (1975)
Black Heat (1976)
Black Samurai (1977)
Cinderella 2000 (1977)
Doctor Dracula (1978)
Sunset Cove (1978)
Death Dimension (1978)
Nurse Sherri (1978)
Carnival Magic (1981)
Lost (1983)



Making Friends With Fear and Mortal Terror

*A Talk With Horror's
Enfant Terrible*

Jack Ketchum



Photo credit: Claudio Sforza

By Amy Grech & Michael McCarty

He is named after the train robber Black Jack Ketchum. Lauded by such giants of the genre as Stephen King, Robert Bloch, Bentley Little, Edward Lee, Richard Laymon, and Ed Gorman. Jack Ketchum writes high-voltage horror. You don't get novels this electrifying unless you're biting into a toaster with your braces.

Shocking? Yes.

Scary? You betcha.

Sick? Yes, he is one sick puppy.

Jack Ketchum is the pseudonym for a former actor, singer, teacher, literary agent, lumber salesman, and soda jerk - a former flower child and baby boomer who believes that in 1956, Elvis, dinosaurs, and horror

probably saved his life.

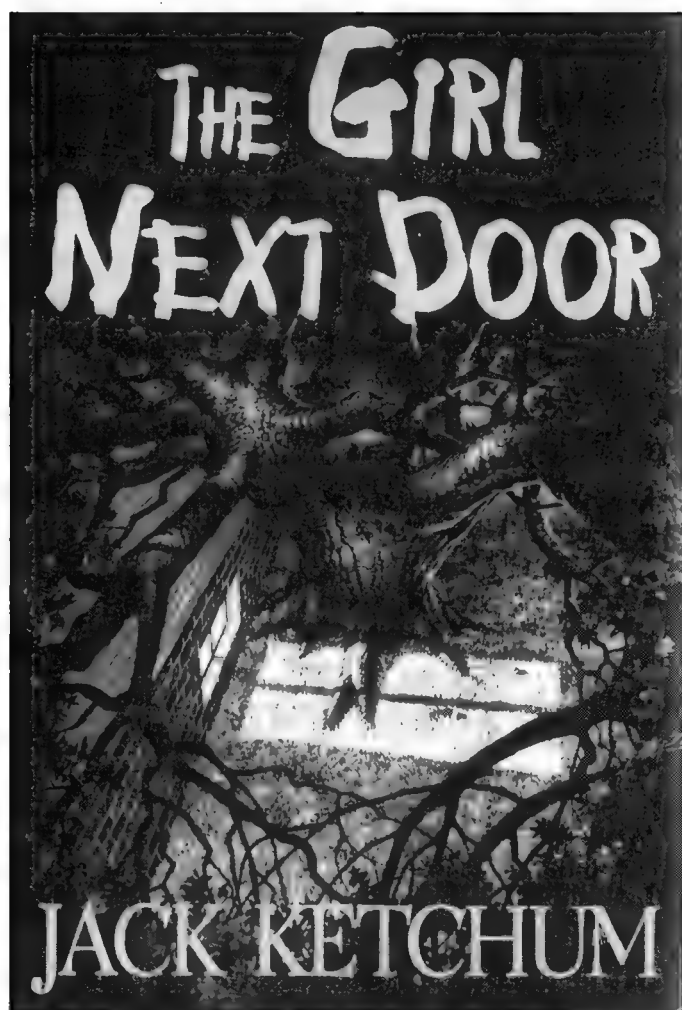
His first novel *Off Season*, prompted the *Village Voice* to publicly scold its publisher for treading in violent pornography. Ketchum personally disagrees, but is perfectly happy to let you decide for yourself. His short story "The Box" won a 1994 Bram Stoker Award from the HWA. The story "Gone" won again in 2000. And in 2003 Jack won a Stoker for both best collection for *Peaceable Kingdom* and best long fiction for *Closing Time*. He has written eleven novels, the latest of which are *Red*, *Ladies' Night*, and *The Lost*. The stories are collected in *The Exit At Toledo Blade Boulevard*, *Broken on the Wheel of Sex*, and *Peaceable Kingdom*.

Ketchum's novella *Old Flames* is

currently available as a limited edition hardcover from Cemetery Dance, and as a mass-market paperback from Leisure Horror. Stephen King cited Jack's novella *The Crossings* in his speech at the 2003 National Book Awards.

Bloodletting Press recently published *Book of Souls*, a collection of non-fiction memoirs by Jack. Collected in this volume are "Henry Miller and the Push" (originally published in *Exit at Toledo Blade Boulevard*), "The Dust of the Heavens" (originally published as a chapbook from James Cahill), "Risky Living: A Memoir" (originally published as an afterward to the Gauntlet Press edition of *Hide and Seek*), and "Us Again" (Jack's reminiscences of 9/11).

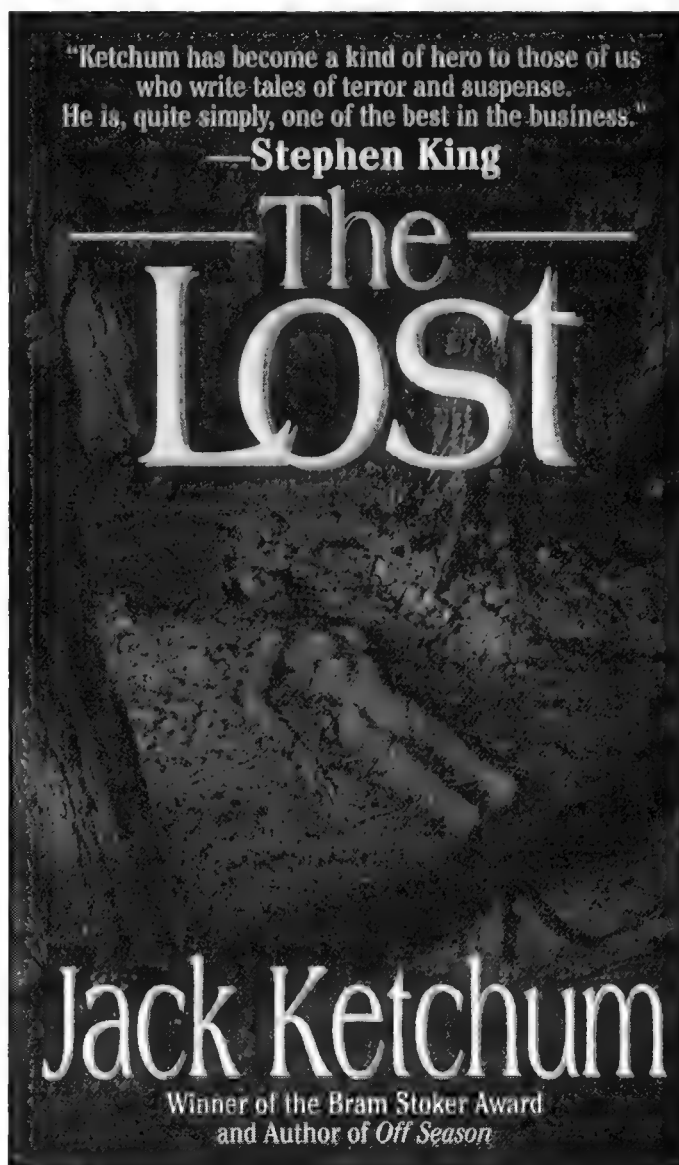
BRUTARIAN: When is extreme horror too extreme for Jack Ketchum?



JACK: When there's no point to it. Graphic for graphic's sake. When it's predictable.

BRUT: Your books *Red*, *The Girl Next Door*, and *The Lost* all have been turned into movies. Of the three, which one do you feel is truest to the book, and why?

JACK: I think I've been amazingly lucky in that all three have been quite true to the source material. Each of them have diverted here and there of course - the brief love affair was cut from *Red*, the coda eliminated from *The Lost*, Ruth's death scene changed in *The Girl Next Door* - but they're movies, so you expect changes. But the feel of each of the books is there, the emotional weight is true. And damned if I'm picking one.



BRUT: *Both you and Clive Barker are famous for writing about the different levels of pain. Pain is an individual experience, how do you give it mass-market appeal?*

JACK: There's a whole spectrum of pain awaiting us out here in the world all the time, physical and emotional. If you decide you're going to assay the subject of pain - and you do it well - you make the reader feel it, identify with it, just like any other experience or emotion. And identifying with a character or characters is probably the main reason fiction is appealing in the first place. You don't usually read a novel through to the end because you find the setting appealing. It's the characters and the situations they find themselves in that capture you.

BRUT: *Your relentless novel The Girl Next Door challenges the reader to consider what they know about pain as they witness an unthinkable act. What inspired you to write this book?*

JACK: The true story behind it - the murder of Sylvia Likens. There are exceptions, like *The Executioner's Song* and *In Cold Blood*, but often fiction can do what just telling the facts of a story can't do. So I'd considered a true-crime approach and discarded the idea, because I thought that I could - through characters, through what they see and feel and do - bring the story home to readers on a far more personal level. Really hurt you with it. The strength of fiction is that it frees the imagination by its very nature. People with little imagination usually don't read novels. Those that do, can be reached almost as though they were experiencing these things themselves.

BRUT: *When Stephen King wrote The Dead Zone, his agonist killed a dog, and he received several angry letters from pet lovers. In the beginning of Red, the protagonist's dog is killed. Did you receive several angry letters too? Are you a pet owner? If so, what kind of pets do you own?*

JACK: I grew up with dogs but since college, when I took up apartment living, it's been cats. Now I can't imagine life without them. I have four of them - Zoey, Cujo, George, and Gracie. I never got angry letters from *anybody*, really - reviewers excepted - until the movie of *The Girl Next Door* got widely distributed and a movie tie-in edition of the book was published. Since then, I've even had a couple of death threats. I wrote to Steve King and said, "Look! I've joined your club!"

BRUT: *You write both extreme horror and kid's books and do it well. Is it harder or easier to write for kids?*

JACK: I've only written one book for kids called *The Sandcastle*, and it's never been published. Anyone out there interested? You must be referring to *The Transformed Mouse*, which started out its life as a kid's book and which I turned into a fable for adults. I don't find it any easier or harder. It's fiction. You find the characters, tone, and story, and you run with it.

BRUT: *Which do you find more difficult to write, novels or short stories?*

JACK: Novels. Largely because they're more difficult to start. With a novel you're talking about a marriage. With a story it's a brief affair. Contemplating marriage, at least for me, is a lot more daunting.

BRUT: *When you start a new project, be it a collaboration, a novel, or short story, do work from an outline or notes, or do you run with the story wherever your characters take you?*

JACK: I hate outlines. They kill the fun, the spontaneity. I have a three-quarter, wrap-around bulletin board and I work from that. As far as I'm concerned, whoever invented the post-a-note stick-up pads deserves the Nobel Prize for literature.

BRUT: *Why do you set most of your work in*

New England? Do you think New England is scarier than elsewhere in America?

JACK: Most of my stuff, though by no means all, seems to call for characters in relative isolation. There's still plenty of that in New England. I've found it in New Jersey, though, in Greece, along the Mexican border - even in Florida.

BRUT: *What is next for Jack Ketchum?*

JACK: I've written two movies this year, an adaptation of my novel *Offspring*, which ModernCine have already shot and which is now in post-production - they did *The Girl Next Door* if you recall. That should be out early next year. Also an adaptation of my novella *Old Flames*, which has been optioned by Chris Sivertson, the director of *The Lost*. Next summer Leisure will publish *Cover*, which last saw paperback in a barely-distributed Warner edition way back in 1987. There are a couple of new short stories in the offing, and *Broken of the Wheel of Sex*. Next for me at the writing desk is probably a short, half-hour film, about which I can't say much at the moment.

BRUT: *Writers are advised to "take chances" in their writing. What does taking chances mean to Jack Ketchum?*

JACK: Write what you like to write, when you want to write it, not what you think might sell big time. If it does, fine. If not, no problem. Have fun.

BRUT: *What advice would you give to a writer after the publication of a first novel?*

JACK: Don't be afraid of writing the second one. Don't get worried that you're a one-hit wonder. That can really mess with your brain - I know it did for me. Chances are that if you gave birth to one decent novel, your hips are wide enough to give birth to another.

BRUT: *Last words?*

JACK: You mean like an epitaph? I like the real Jack Ketchum's last words on the gallows: "I'll be in hell before you finish breakfast, boys! Let 'er rip!"

BOOKS BY JACK KETCHUM

Off Season (1980)
Hide And Seek (1984)
Cover (1987)
The Girl Next Door (1989)
She Wakes (1989)
Offspring (1991)
Joyride (1994) (aka Road Kill)
Strangehold (1995) (aka Only Child)
Red (1995)
Ladies Night (1997)
The Exit At Toledo Blade Boulevard (1998)
Right To Life and 2 Stories (1998)
The Dust of the Heavens (1998)
Broken on the Wheel of Sex (1999)
Father And Son (1999)
Masks (1999)
Cover (2000)
Ephemera (2000)
The Lost (2001)
Station Two (2001)
Honor System (2002)
Peaceable Kingdom (2002)
Right to Life (2002)
At Home with the VCR (2003)
Sleep Disorder (2003)
The Crossings (2004)
Seascape (2005)
Absinthe (2006)
Weed Species (2006)
Closing Time and Other Stories (2007)
Book of Souls (2008)
Old Flames (2008)
Triage (2008)

FILM ADAPTATIONS

The Lost (2005)
The Girl Next Door (2007)
Red (2008)



THE AMAZING JENNY WOLFE:

More Than The Sum of Her Influences

By Dom Salemi

We would have let everyone in on the well-kept secret - outside of Austin - that is Jenny Wolfe. Yes, we would have, but, well, she was only thirteen when SteadyBoy Records sent us her debut CD a few years ago, and you just can't be too careful these days. Jenny Wolfe and the Pack was a knockout, but people start to get the wrong idea when you start singing the praises of one so young. So we kept quiet.

Fortunately, Steady Freddie Krc, founder of Texas power-pop legends The Explosives,

and a legend in his own right thanks to his work with the likes of Jerry Jeff Walker, Roky Erickson, and his current outfit the Freddie Steady 5, had no misgivings on this score. The venerable Mr. Krc made Jenny one of his initial signings to his fledgling record company, and from there went on to mentor her and, subsequently, take a firm hand in steering her in the right direction. That meant producing her CDs and lending a hand in the studio with multi-instrumental work, and bringing in ace sidemen like The Explosive's guitarist Cam King and Double Trouble's keyboardman Reese Wynans.

None of which would matter one jot, not one wit, if Ms. Wolfe did not possess the ability to deliver the goods. Which she does. In spades. Reviewers have likened her to Linda Ronstadt, and that is indeed not inaccurate; still, we hear more Tanya Tucker when Jenny's in femme-ascendent mode, as on Krc's poppy garage confection "I Wanna See You Cry," or a channeling of Joan Jett on the rootsy stomper "Tell Me No." But what do we know, other than that Jenny can make us laugh at her audacity for taking on such chestnuts like "I Want You Back," or "Dancing In The Streets," or just break down and cry with a heartbreaking take on Big Star's "Thirteen."

No matter who you think you hear behind the little girl with the big, powerful voice, after a few spins of her latest CD *After School*, you'll come to the conclusion, as we did, that Jenny Wolfe is sui generis and, as with all true originals, beholden to no one. Oh yes, she's going on seventeen now, and her mom and Mr. Krc said it was fine by them if we posed Jenny a few questions.

BRUTARIAN: So tell us how you came to be a singer and how you were discovered, if you'd be so kind.

JENNY WOLFE: Well, I started at a rock

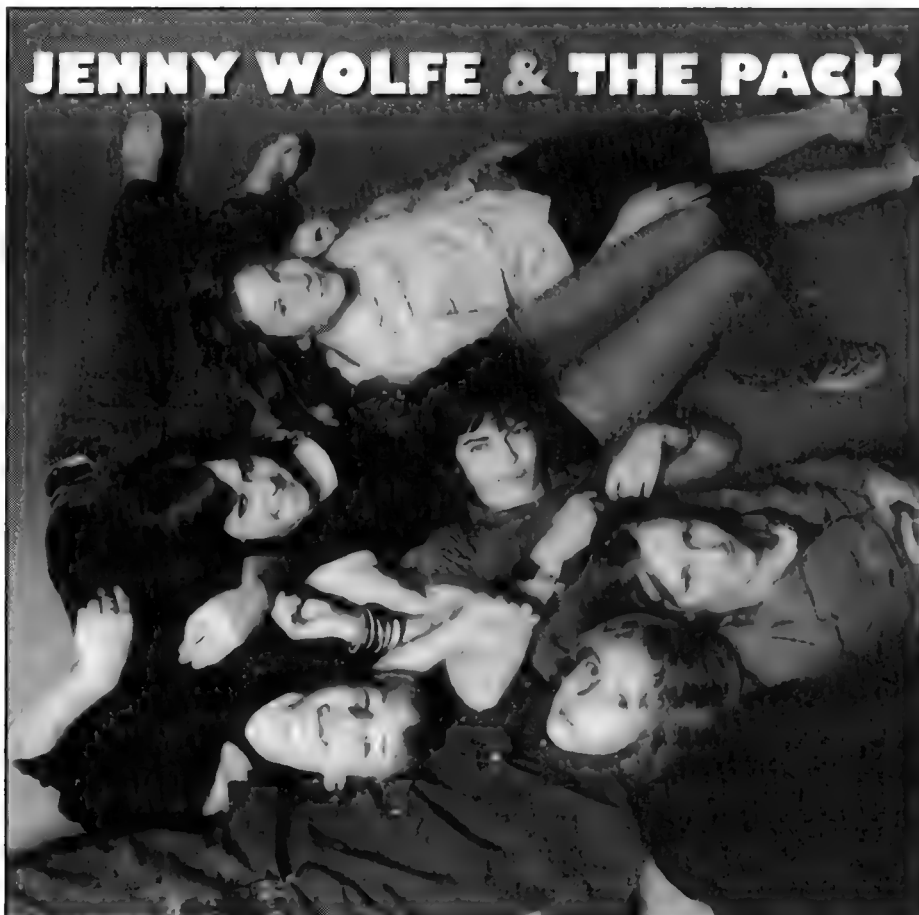
music school Natural Ear Music School when I was ten, and I met Freddie Krc at the music school. We just clicked; we worked really well together because I was interested in what he had to say, and he was interested in teaching me. So, when I was thirteen, Freddie signed me to his label SteadyBoy Records, and I recorded my first album, and it did very

well. Now I'm sixteen, and have recorded my second album, called *After School*, and it's done very well, even though it's only been out a few weeks. [It was released Feb. 17th 2009.]

BRUT: You're way too young to know some of these songs on the new CD! Cuts by The Zombies, Beau Brummels, The Shirelles, et al, that

is way beyond cool. How did these classics, some of them rather obscure, find their way into your repertoire? Was it a result of your inquisitive, restless musical mind, or the suggestions of Mr. Krc?

JENNY: I had a small foundation of older music from Natural Ear Music School. But when I started working with Freddie, he introduced me to MUCH more. Now I do some investigating here and there, you know, between school and homework and stuff. I love the 60's era; it's so much fun, and way more hip than the stuff on the top of the charts today.



BRUT: *Two of the best cuts on the fabulous CD were co-written by you in collaboration with Mr. Krc. He's really a fine songwriter and has worked with many legends in the business; was writing with him intimidating, or did it just seem like the thing to do? How does the collaborative process work with him?*

JENNY: It was kind of intimidating, at first. I had always loved Freddie's songs; they had a certain tone about them that just seemed to speak to people. I wasn't sure I could keep up with him. But then he started teaching me how to use the same tone he did and to use all the little writing tricks most people don't think about but that make a whole world of difference.

BRUT: *How do you balance schoolwork, taking leads in high school musical productions - Guys and Dolls wasn't it? Did you play Brando's girl or Sinatra's? - and touring and practicing?*

JENNY: Haha. Yes, it was *Guys and Dolls*, and unfortunately, I was just a hotbox girl. It's all good because I had a great time. To answer your initial question, it is not easy at all. My school is tougher than most public schools to begin with. Sometimes it gets really stressful, but I've found a good balance. I get as much of my work done at school as I can and save after school and weekends for music. It seems to work very well.

BRUT: *What do your friends say about your hip, almost retro taste in music? Do they chide you for not going in the direction of teen dance-pop a la Ms. Spears, or soulful Dustyesque pop a la Amy Winehouse, Joss Stone and the like?*

JENNY: Well, it all really depends; some of my friends think it is the coolest thing ever, and a few don't really pay attention. Actually, I just try to keep my school life and my music life separate. Hardly anyone at my school knows that I do music; it's really only my friends. I'm not really sure why it's like that;

I guess it's just easier when the two don't mingle.

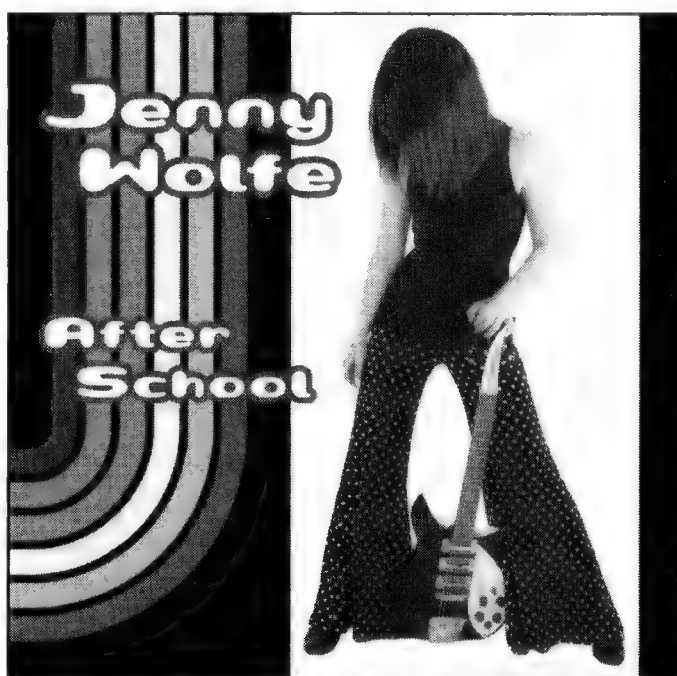
BRUT: *Ok, we just have to ask you this: Have you met Roky Erickson yet, and if so, what was he like?*

JENNY: You know I think I met him a super long time ago, although I don't really recall. Wow, that answer was anticlimactic!

BRUT: *How do you handle being compared to legends like Linda Ronstadt - we'll add the other names to whom you've been compared later, but you get the point, I'm sure.*

JENNY: It's just an honor. I love being compared to the talented people I love; it makes me feel all gooey inside. Add smiley face here!

BRUT: *"After School," one of the cuts on your latest CD, more than hints at problems a young star-on-the-rise can have with jealous friends. How do you deal with this, and how do you know who your real friends are at this point? That is, how do you separate the trendies from your soul mates? I know this all sounds like questions from a bad 80s teen movie, but we are fascinated nevertheless.*



JENNY: Haha. Well, I guess I've just gotten better at picking the people I want to be close to. I have a few best friends, and then other people I like but don't know on a very personal level. It probably also helps that every single one of my close friends are teen musicians too, so they don't use me to "feel cool" because they know at least somewhat where I stand and what I work for.

BRUT: *Some of the songs you sing, like "Shakin' All Over," and "Baby, It's You," appear to call for a woman far older and more experienced. While we may not necessarily agree with that sentiment given your performance of these songs, how would you answer critics who might level this charge at you?*

JENNY: When it comes to maturity, I consider myself to be much farther along than most. A lot of the time, I feel like I don't even belong in high school because the people are so immature and just . . . high schoolish. Yes, I know I'm only sixteen and haven't lived quite enough to be taken as seriously as adults, but I don't consider myself naive.

BRUT: *You remind us a bit of Rachel Sweet, a highly talented young singer like yourself, who got derailed early in her career when both her record company and manager decided to put her good looks ahead of her extraordinary talent. As a not unattractive young person, how do you plan to avoid this pitfall? Do you view Rachel's career, or rather lack thereof, as a cautionary tale?*

JENNY: Well, I know that there's always the possibility that people will look at me instead of listening to me. But honestly, I'm not worried about that because I feel like my music is much more interesting than my appearance. As it should be.

BRUT: *Again, some of the songs are about suffering, and here's a college grad course question for you - I majored in English Literature and Philosophy so forgive the*

pompous question, but I just can't help myself - do you think suffering and bad times are necessary for your art and for interpreting songs with mournful themes or ones dealing with loss and pain?

JENNY: I think it's good inspiration either way. Either happiness or sadness. Without life experience there isn't much emotion, and without emotion, art isn't very interesting.

BRUT: *Freddie Krc, your producer and bandmate, made some interesting comments about American Idol and music not being a competition. Care to comment?*

JENNY: I don't think music should be a competition. I actually don't even think it should be a business, but it is, so I'm going to embrace it and work with it. It's just that music isn't about winning, or money, or any of that. And sometimes it's upsetting when people abuse their musical talents just for the money or for the attention.

BRUT: *As an entertainer and an artist, how do you keep the performances both entertaining and emotionally honest? And while touring there certainly must be moments when exhaustion and boredom set in. How do you combat this?*

JENNY: It's both emotionally and physically draining. Basically when I'm on stage, I'm trying my absolute hardest to make the audience feel the same feelings I feel when I sing. That is honestly and truly one of the hardest things in the world to do.

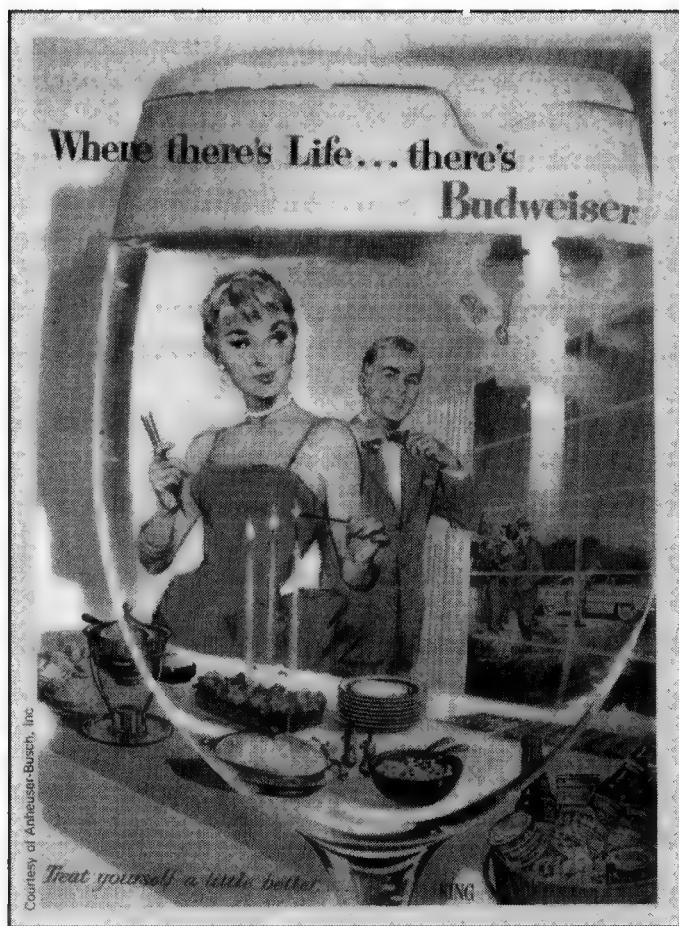
BRUT: *Is it a constant battle to keep yourself from turning radio staples like "Dancing In The Street" into a bit of campy theater? Having done stage work now, we're thinking that that might be a bit of a temptation with songs so well known by the listening public.*

JENNY: I respect theater as much as I respect music or any other art. When I can't fully know the feelings behind a song

because I haven't experienced what the song is talking about, I act. Or rather, I dream up the scenario in my head and play it like film and then project it onto the audience. So, yes, some of my music is theater, but I don't think the difference is very noticeable. Again, insert smile here.

BRUT: Influences please, and why you were drawn to these people, and how they inspired you.

JENNY: Oh my goodness! There's too many to type! I guess I'll just give you categories.



People who have personally helped me:

- Freddie Krc
- Cam King
- John Hahn (drummer for the Freddie Steady 5)
- Chris Johnson (bassist for FS5)
- Will Ivy (organist for FS5)

Musicians (and bands) who have spoken to me whether I know them personally or not:

- Kevin Barnes from Of Montreal because his songwriting ability is so incredible that it never stops impressing me, and I listen to Of Montreal almost daily.
- The Zombies because their songwriting never stops impressing me either.
- Ratatat because they can do things with synthesizers that no one else can. In my opinion, they're the best electronica band, right up there with Daft Punk.
- Reese Wynans because I can't even fathom how he became so good at piano and organ. I was in shock the first time I heard him play; I'd never heard anything so incredible.

Beyond Dead

J.
R.

By Jason Archer

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Fans of independent cinema should be quite familiar with the name J.R.

Bookwalter. The Dead Next Door, J.R.'s zombie epic, completed in 1989, is one of the more popular and critically acclaimed horror films of its time. Quite a feat, as it took four years to make, was shot on Super-8 stock, and cost next to nothing to produce. In the decade that followed, J.R. produced or directed a diverse selection of films: The Sandman, Polymorph, Kingdom of the Vampire, and Ozone, an undead feature that is, in many ways, superior to Dead Next Door. From there it was on to Hollywood and Charles Band's Full Moon Pictures, where J.R. was at the helm for, among others, two Witchouse sequels. Growing tired of what he calls on his website a life of "servitude," Bookwalter returned to his home state of Ohio in 2006 to begin executive producing movies for his own Tempe DVD company. 2008 saw the release of Forest Primeval, Poison Sweethearts, and most recently, Platoon of the Dead, which just hit DVD shelves in America.

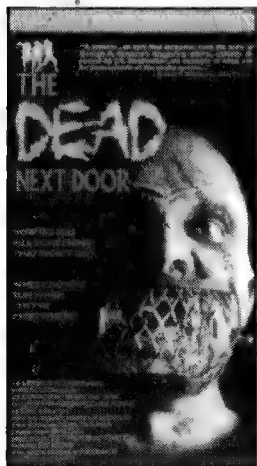
BRUTARIAN: *Can you tell us a bit about yourself, J.R., for those who don't know who you are?*

J.R. BOOKWALTER: Let's see, I started on my first feature film *The Dead Next Door* in 1985, after years of making Super-8mm short films. I followed it up with a trio of 16mm features in 1989-1990, and then some video features in 1991-1992. After being dissatisfied with making films for another company, I made *Ozone* and launched my own company, Tempe Video, to distribute it and films made from other low-budget producers. I moved to Los Angeles in 1997 and soon got involved with Full Moon Pictures, producing thirteen features for them in less than three years while founding Tempe DVD.

BRUT: *When did you first realise that you wanted to become a film maker?*

BOOK: As a kid, I used to make little photocopied fanzines for my friends and family, but I didn't actually think about making movies until the fall of 1978 when one of my school buddies and I started making stop-motion animation shorts using *Star Wars* action figures. *Star Wars* was probably the film that changed my life and made me interested in doing it, but *Dawn of the Dead* was the one that made me want to make horror movies.

BRUT: *What was your first movie called, and can you tell us a bit about it?*



BOOK: *The Dead Next Door* was my first feature-length film. I started on it in 1985, most of it was shot in 1986, and we finished it in early 1989. It's about a virus that causes the dead to come back to life, and the government has formed

an elite unit called The Zombie Squad to combat the problem. When the soldiers head to Ohio to find a cure for the virus, they are confronted with a crazed religious cult hell-bent on keeping the dead alive and well.

BRUT: *Did you have any problems while shooting The Dead Next Door? If so, what happened?*

BOOK: Oh, you better believe it! [laughs] Especially for as long as the whole production dragged out! I had to replace most of the original cast, because we couldn't start shooting before the winter of 1985, and by the time spring came, most of them had moved on to other things. Same with a lot of the crew. Working in the Super-8mm format had its own problems, almost all of the first two weeks of shooting was way underexposed due to a camera malfunction. So we had to shut down, fix the problem, and then reshoot and continue. There were too many problems to list them all! [laughs]

BRUT: *Though it took four years to shoot The Dead Next Door, do you have any regrets after you shot this movie?*

BOOK: Part of the great thing of making this movie at such a young age was not knowing when to quit. It just never occurred to me! And that spirit was infectious among most of the cast and crew. Whenever some challenge or roadblock came our way, we just dug in our heels and forged ahead come hell or high water! Looking back on it, I admire that spirit, because I certainly don't have the energy or patience for it now that I'm almost forty-three years old. [laughs] But no, I try not to have regrets about anything I've done, and *The Dead Next Door* is no exception; it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

BRUT: *Within those four years, did you have any problems with your film or cast?*

BOOK: Really, most of the people involved were behind what I was doing, and I

certainly couldn't have done it without them. Of course, there were a few folks who flaked out or got cranky as time went on. At the time, I made some enemies, because I didn't have patience for their whining, but looking back on it now, it's a miracle that anyone saw it through to that production! [laughs]

BRUT: *What films inspired you the most to create The Dead Next Door?*

BOOK: The Romero zombie flicks, of course! As I was writing *DND*, both *Return of the Living Dead* and *Day of the Dead* were hitting theatres, so it was an exciting time to be doing it. But I think more than being inspired by movies, I was inspired by a lot of things in my life, fascination with religious cults especially, thanks to having grown up during the Jim Jones-Guyana tragedy. AIDS was just coming into the public awareness, and the idea of a virus that had no cure appealed to me. My father has been a police officer as long as I can remember, so the Zombie Squad came out of being around that. And during college, I drove back and forth from Akron, Ohio to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, so the scenery inspired me to set the movie where I did.

BRUT: *How much roughly did it cost to make The Dead Next Door back then?*

BOOK: The best estimates were \$125,000 by the time it was finished, which sounds like a lot of money today! But at the time, movies like *The Evil Dead* cost \$500,000, so \$125k was peanuts compared to that. I figure that half of that budget was wasted on mistakes from not knowing what the hell we were doing a lot of the time.

BRUT: *Is being considered a cult moviemaker an honor, or would you rather be known for your body of work?*

BOOK: Hmmm, I dunno. Interesting question. Still, for whatever reason, whatever people like or don't like about

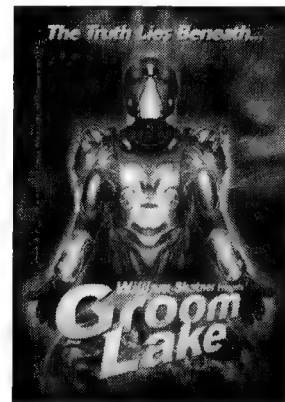
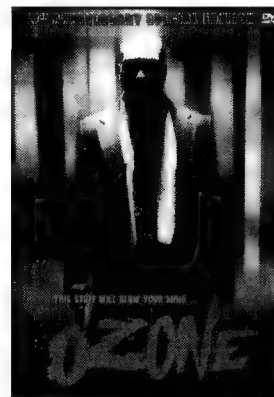
my work, even after twenty-five years, it's strange that anyone wants my autograph or even has an interest in meeting or interviewing me. I still think of myself as a fan who got the chance to make some of my own movies; I don't really view myself as a celebrity or a cult figure.

BRUT: *Well then, let's turn to your other films, tell us about the pictures you most enjoyed working on.*

BOOK: Oh, many! I have lost count of how many movies I've produced now. [laughs] But I'd say some highlights would be *Ozone* (1994), because it was my chance to redeem myself after a lot of bad movies made in the wake of *DND*, and *Witchouse 2: Blood Coven* (2000), because I got to go to Romania and work with an awesome cinematographer and finally make a movie on 35mm. It's hard to pick favorites.

BRUT: *Ok, howzabout the projects you just wished you could walk away from?*

BOOK: Curiously enough, it was the last film I directed, *Deadly Stingers*. I knew going in that it wasn't a film I wanted to make, and the experience was not very pleasant. Producing *Groom Lake* for director/co-star William Shatner - definitely the worst experience. That one was recently reissued on DVD here, so I watched it again to show my wife, who missed out on all the insanity. All I can say is, unlike fine wine, it didn't age well. [laughs]



BRUT: *Lately, we've been exposed to a number of remakes of classic, late 70s-early 80s horror films a la Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Dawn Of The Dead, and recently, Friday the 13th, and Halloween. Are you actively seeking financing for a remake of The Dead Next Door?*

BOOK: I considered pursuing a remake a few years ago, but I decided that fans have had enough of this crap pushed down their throats already. [laughs] I believe you should only remake something with a great idea that was poorly executed the first time around, a movie like *Basket Case* springs to mind; it's a guilty pleasure of mine. There is certainly a lot of room for improvement with *The Dead Next Door*, so I guess that it would also fall into that category, still, it's not something I am actively pursuing.

BRUT: *The underground filmmaking scene has changed quite radically due to Internet and digital and computer technology. Do you think this will help indie filmmakers, and in the process, allow them to be more innovative and reach a wider audience?*

BOOK: It's funny, because I made my early movies using whatever tools I could afford, which often resulted in very low-brow results. I always hoped and dreamed that the technology would catch up to what I wanted to do back then. Now that it has, I'm less interested than ever in taking advantage of it! [laughs] The DVD revolution has been great, and I think it's always a good idea for aspiring filmmakers to make their own movies. The problem is, most people don't want to take the time to learn the mechanics of making movies, and that results in a lot of really bad films getting made.

It's even affecting Hollywood, because there are more bad movies made now than ever before! So, it's the best and worst thing, really. The technology hasn't really helped get a wider audience, because now that everyone is doing it, it just makes it that

much harder to stand out in the crowd.

BRUT: *Are there any projects you are currently at work on, about which you'd like to give us the inside scoop?*

BOOK: I've been really inactive the last few years, mostly overseeing my DVD business, and remastering the older flicks, as well as releasing stuff from new filmmakers. I jokingly consider myself "semi-retired" from filmmaking now - the world has enough bad movies to contend with. [laughs] But I don't completely rule out doing it again, under the right conditions and circumstances. In the meantime, I keep busy with freelance editing, some tech journalism, and various odds and ends to keep the lights on and the bills paid.

BRUT: *As a director/producer and writer, are there any other independent filmmakers whom you admire?*

BOOK: I've been continually impressed with Andy and Luke Campbell. I picked up their early flicks like *Midnight Skater*, *Demon Summer*, and *The Red Skulls*, and they made *Poison Sweethearts* for me a couple years ago. They're one of the few people who continue to grow and improve with each movie. *The Stink of Flesh* writer/director Scott Phillips, also, I always knew he was a great writer, but when I saw *Flesh*, I was just blown away to find him to be an equally-good filmmaker.

BRUT: *You also own Tempe Entertainment, which is the production and distribution company for your films. Do you find working on the business end cuts into your filmmaking and writing time?*

BOOK: Yes, absolutely. As I mentioned, the last few years I've mostly been babysitting the DVD distribution business, although that was also because I had produced thirteen movies in less than three years for Full Moon Pictures, and was suffering creative burnout as a result. I find it very difficult to focus on writing now, which is strange for me, because

I used to sit down and write volumes when I was younger! [laughs]

BRUT: *Do you have any advice or tips for aspiring filmmakers?*

BOOK: Mainly just use common sense when you make your movies. Oh yes, and check your ego on the soundstage! Especially today, it seems as if the younger generation is too quick to dismiss older films. I don't see the respect or admiration for what came before them that my generation had. All I can say to those people is, trust me, no matter how good you think you are, the day will come when you get bad reviews or your movie doesn't sell millions of copies like you think it should. It's a very humbling experience, so be prepared. [laughs]

BRUT: *Horror fans love to know what filmmakers like yourself watch on DVD from time-to-time. Therefore, we must ask this question: What are J.R Bookwalter's Top Five Horror Movies of all time?*

BOOK: In no particular order, I'd have to go with *Dawn of the Dead*, *Psycho*, *The Fog*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *The Evil Dead*. And of course, where applicable, I mean the originals. I refuse to watch the remakes. [laughs]

BRUT: *Are there any actors you have worked in the past, who you'd like to work with again in the near future?*

BOOK: I got to work with Andrew Prine on *Witchouse 2*. I was always a big fan of the '70s flick *Grizzly*, which he starred in, so that was a big thrill, and we got along great. Of course, I have a stable of friends who I will always work with, like Brinke Stevens (*Witchouse 3: Demon Fire*), Ariauna Albright (*Polymorph*), James Black (*Ozone*), and many others.

BRUT: *You mentioned earlier about being surprised that people want your autograph*

and so forth, nevertheless, what is the one thing you would like horror fans to think of, when they hear the name J.R. Bookwalter?

BOOK: Good question. I seem to mostly be known for the independent spirit I've put into these movies, rather than for the movies themselves. That's understandable to me, because I'm my own worst critic. [laughs] So, I guess I'd like folks to watch my flicks and know that they'll be entertained, even if they're not the best movies ever made.

This interview originally appeared, in slightly different form, on the incredible *DVD Resurrections* website. For more on Mr. Bookwalter, hit his personal blog at www.jrbookwalter.com or his company website, www.tempevideo.com.

THE FILMS OF J.R. BOOKWALTER

Deadly Stingers (2003)
Witchouse 3: Demon Fire (2001)
Twice the Fun (2000)
Witchouse 2: Blood Coven (1999)
Polymorph (1996)
The Sandman (1995)
Ozone (1993)
Galaxy of the Dinosaurs (1992)
Humanoids from Atlantis (1992)
Kingdom of the Vampire (1991)
Zombie Cop (1991)
Robot Ninja (1989)
The Dead Next Door (1989)

Getting Spacey

With *Larry Niven*

By Jack Hillman

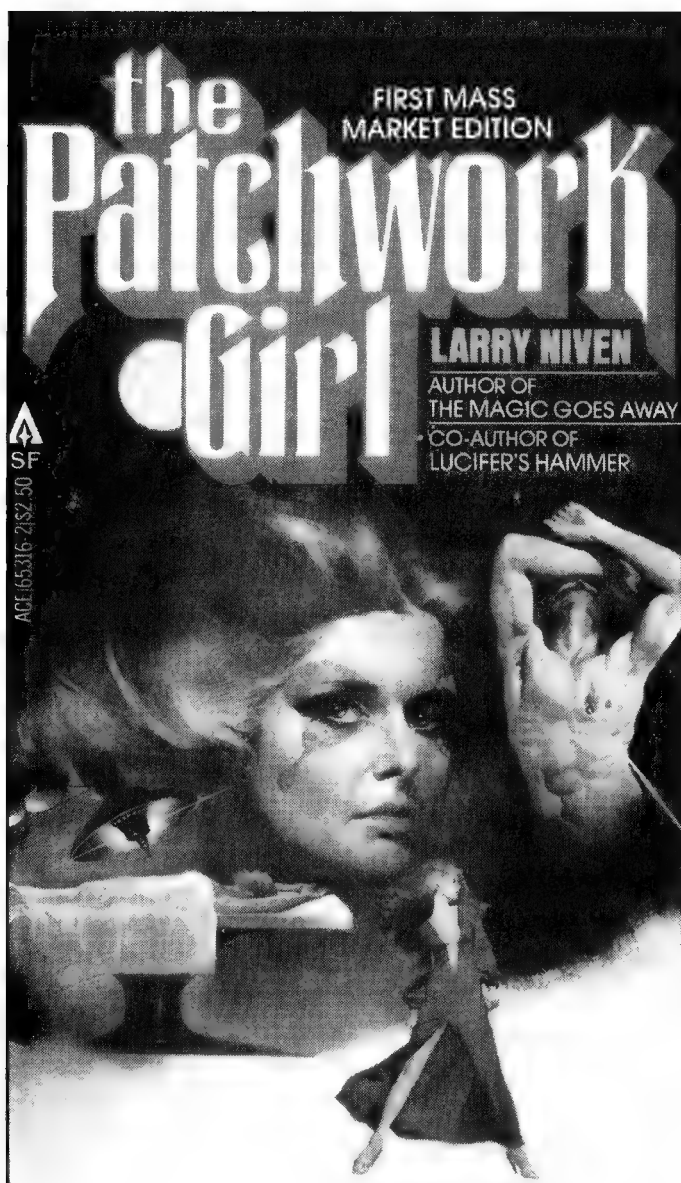
Laurence van Cott Niven (born April 30, 1938) is best known for *Ringworld*, published in 1970, which won the Hugo Award, Nebula Award, Locus Award, and Ditmar Award for Best Novel. Predominately a hard science fiction writer, Mr. Niven's work is often based on theoretical physics and larger-than-life scientific concepts. *Ringworld*, for example, was Mr. Niven's attempt to create a world similar to a Dyson sphere, without the need for a full shell-like structure.

In addition to the awards for *Ringworld*, his awards listing on his website (www.LarryNiven.org) includes four Best Short Story Hugo awards (1967, 1972, 1975, and 1976), an additional Locus Award for Best Novel (*The Integral Trees*, 1984), and

another Locus Award for Best Short Story (2001). His novel *Fallen Angels* won the Prometheus Award in 1992, and Best Foreign Novel in Japan in 1998.

BRUTARIAN: Mr. Niven, are you finding that the new science fiction is "hard" enough compared to the hard science fiction you write?

Larry Niven: The new science fiction is harder than what I used to write, considerably harder, at least the good stuff. It's wonderful and reaches further, reaching into the end and beginning of the universe. A lot more is known about the universe these days, and writers are taking advantage of it.



Writers know a lot more quantum physics than I used to. I may be up to snuff there, but I don't write as far into the strange pockets of the universe as opposed to, say, Gregory Benford. Benford is a plasma physicist, which helps his work.

BRUT: *So, having a scientific background helped you as a beginning writer?*

LN: When I got into this field, I had the terrific advantage of being in the "new wave" of writers. I was the only one who wanted to write like Pohl Anderson, and writers like him. But, I was also able to learn things fast enough to be the first in print, or nearly the first person, with a new idea. That was

convenient. These days, anybody can find out the edges of science and get there before me. I can't be first any more; I've got to be best.

BRUT: *You used science as a way to distinguish yourself as a writer?*

LN: When I got into the writing field, it wasn't that there weren't any people who understood science. It was just that the scientists who were writing were specialists. That left me plenty of elbow room. I was a generalist, and I knew my science, but these days you've got people with a lot more knowledge because they've got access to the Internet. The science fiction market today is full of much better science fiction than was being written when I got into the field. I haven't won a Hugo Award since 1976 or so, and I'm writing stories that would have won Hugos in 1976. The competition today is better.

BRUT: *Do you think it's harder now to write science fiction within the solar system, given how much we know now versus what was known before?*

LN: For a period of time, it was certainly harder. We kept learning crucial new things about every planet in the solar system, moving outward. The details of Pluto are only quite recent. They kept changing Mars on me to the point where I wrote a new short story every time they changed Mars, and they became sequels. I wouldn't say it's harder to write stories set in the solar system these days. It's harder work. It's harder work as opposed to being difficult.

BRUT: *When you are creating a new world framework for your novels, do you work it all out first, or does it grow naturally as you're writing the story?*

LN: It kind of grows as I'm writing the story, grows in detail. I had a good general feel for *Ringworld*, but I hadn't worked out all

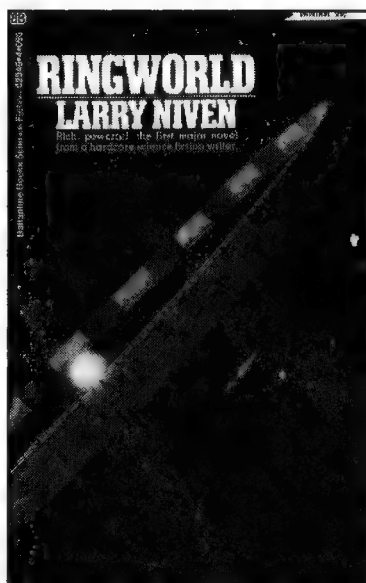
the details of the rings as I wrote. I remember talking at a gathering of writers in Florida, and I discussed the difference with the storms on the Ringworld. The way the ring spins, you don't get a circular storm, you don't get hurricanes, you don't get anything that requires

a spinning ball. But you do get a storm if you punch a hole through the floor and wait awhile. You get air flowing in from all directions. Some of it will be moving faster, so gravity will pull it down in the direction of spin. The other direction will be going up. You wind up with an eye storm. A big, cloudy eye on the sky. It scared the hell out of one of the characters in the novel when he looked up. He thought he was seeing a human eye. I didn't know that one when I started writing the novel.

BRUT: *Do you think the education process today helps or hinders a writer?*

LN: There is more of a discrepancy between the better-educated person and the worst-educated these days. The extremes are more extreme, and it's a bad thing. It's part of the evolution of our society, I'm afraid. It's away from democracy, since democracy depends on an educated populace. We're evolving toward a *kleptocracy*. It means rule by the thieves. When you look at what the government is doing these days, especially recently at this point, they're not even doing it secretly, and that's an interesting thing I've watched evolve, with secrecy becoming nearly impossible for anyone.

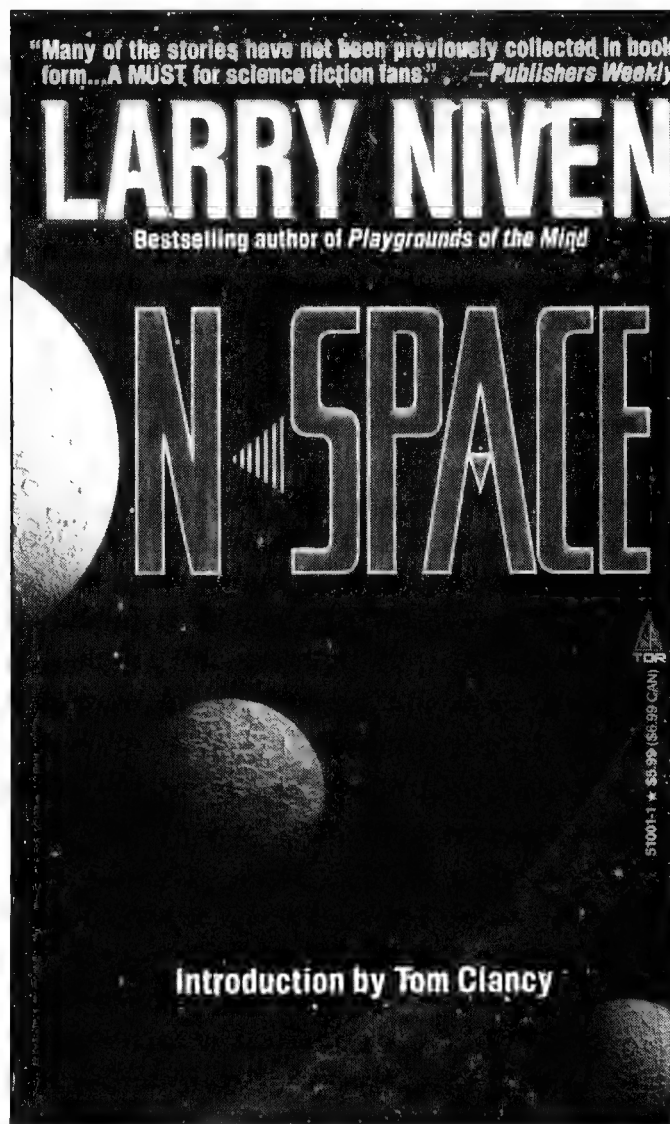
BRUT: *You've spoken in the past of a system of "instant education." Do you feel we are*



headed in that direction with all that is on the Internet today?

LN: "Instant learning" or "easy learning," such as putting information into a human head directly, still holds as a concept. I would hate to have an instant learning machine in the hands of, say, George Bush, whereas I'm not so sure about Obama, and I'm talking as a Libertarian. I don't like Obama's politics, but I think he's the kind of guy who would listen, who would use the machine to get smarter. Or, he would use the machine to put ideas into children's heads and provide an instant education.

BRUT: *So, you believe in an open framework for society with very few secrets?*



LN: Yes. We have cameras on traffic lights, just as an example. But as long as our government doesn't take over the newspapers and news programs, we will get more transparency. This is a good thing. It doesn't stop thieves, but it's still a good thing. But it assumes that people pay attention to what is being reported. It depends on an educated population. Unfortunately, as long as you don't arrest the evildoers, they don't need to worry about you watching while they do it.

It used to be your politicians lived within reach of you and a horsewhip. The reason was lousy transportation. The automobile pretty much put an end to that. Now you can get anywhere almost within a day. Back then, in the first days of our country's government, politicians did better work because they knew the people better. It's the same with writers. The officers of SFWA pretty much took a year off to hold their positions and, when they went back to writing, they sold better because they knew the field better.

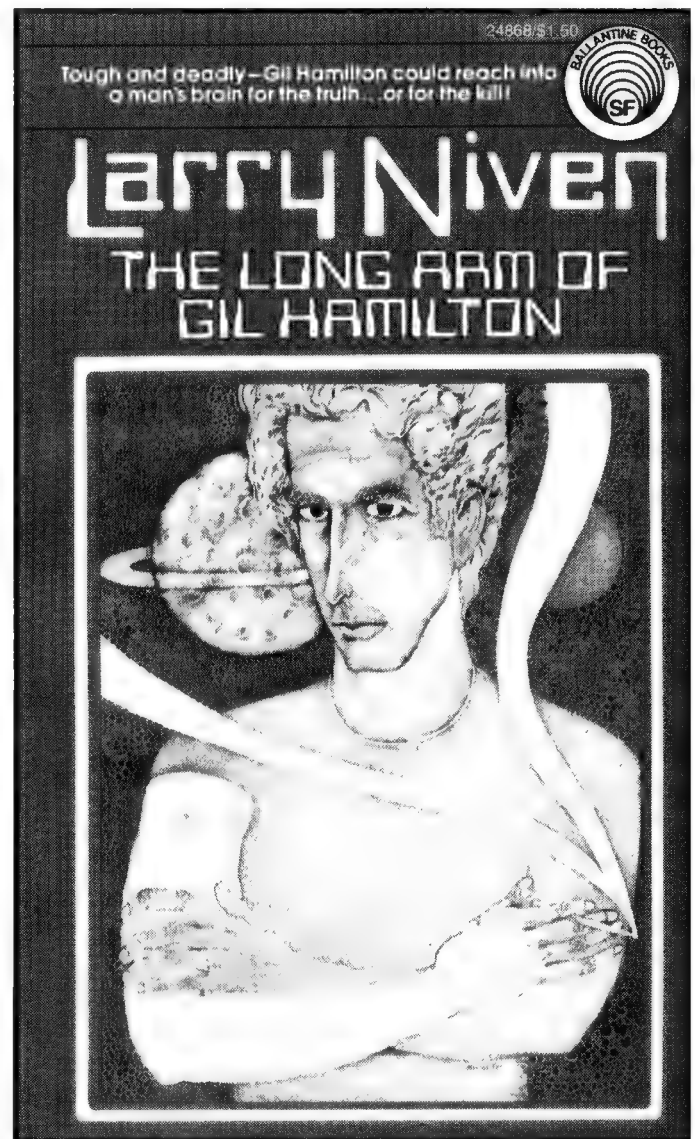
BRUT: *Are you still involved with SIGMA?*
(Author's Note: SIGMA is a group of science fiction writers who provide suggestions to the government about possible threats to our country and our world.)

LN: Yes, but I've never been one of the valuable members. I just don't seem to think mean enough to be able to identify obscure threats. There are science fiction writers who can do that. The latest thing we were asked was, "Tell us what you're really afraid of for the future. What's the greatest fear?" I suggested that genetic engineering was likely to get out of hand. This is what might have been responsible for wiping out all of the species who ought to be contacting us now. Every species runs across the ability to change itself, and eventually they make a mistake. They were operating right where they live.

BRUT: *Would you elaborate on that idea a bit?*

LN: We needed to build a moon base in order to have a safe place to experiment on genetic engineering. If a lab someplace actually manages to come up with some sort of superbug, either on purpose or by accident, and it gets loose, then we wind up depopulating the planet.

I think that's happened out there in the stars already. Otherwise somebody would have been in touch with us by now. What you need to do is to restrict genetic designing to someplace like the moon – far from a moon base, but close enough where they can still communicate, get supplies, and retain the ability to lock it down if there is a problem. Our problem, mankind's problem, is we didn't go and build the moon base. And we may



be the only species that can. The species we see on earth, most of them can't travel. Most species on this planet are restricted to one ecology. They can't travel very far outside that ecology. A species restricted to one ecology will try to rebuild itself where it lives. Man is the only species on this planet that can take his ecosystem with him when he travels.

BRUT: *So you don't think there are intelligent species out in space now?*

LN: Probably not, at least not a species more advanced than we are. If there were, we would be able to see them. Humans are about halfway toward anything really big in the way of engineering. The universe is thirteen point seven billion years or so old. The solar system is five billion years old. There ought to be creatures out there, people who ought to be contacting us because they've developed huge radio antennae already. The theory that there are intelligent beings out there looking for us doesn't seem to be working.

If you allow a little slack, there still ought to be civilizations that have been civilized for billions of years. You have to wind up thinking something must be killing them off. And you think disease, you think atomic wars, and then you think maybe they have a way to change themselves, and ruin themselves that way.

BRUT: *You mean kill themselves off as a species, or just kill themselves back to some lower level of civilization, or both?*

LN: Change themselves to something that wasn't intelligent anymore is one possible answer. But as a general thing, they made one mistake and then had to live with it.

BRUT: *So you think any species that reached that point in its development would also turn toward genetic engineering?*

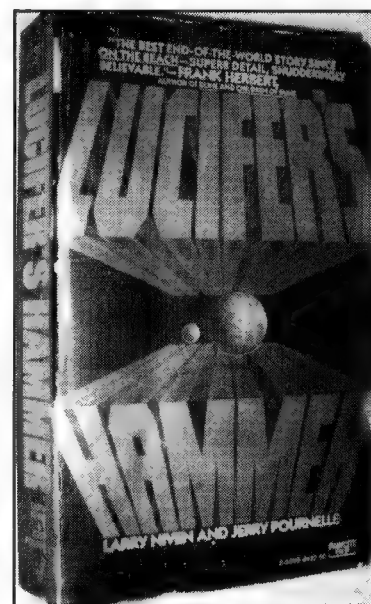
LN: I'm only interested in sentient species. After all, ants may be playing genetic engineering with aphids, but they aren't sentient, and they aren't going to contact us. The species that are not contacting us is the problem. Where is the species who ought to be knocking on our doors, when our own neighbors on our planet aren't trying to talk to us?

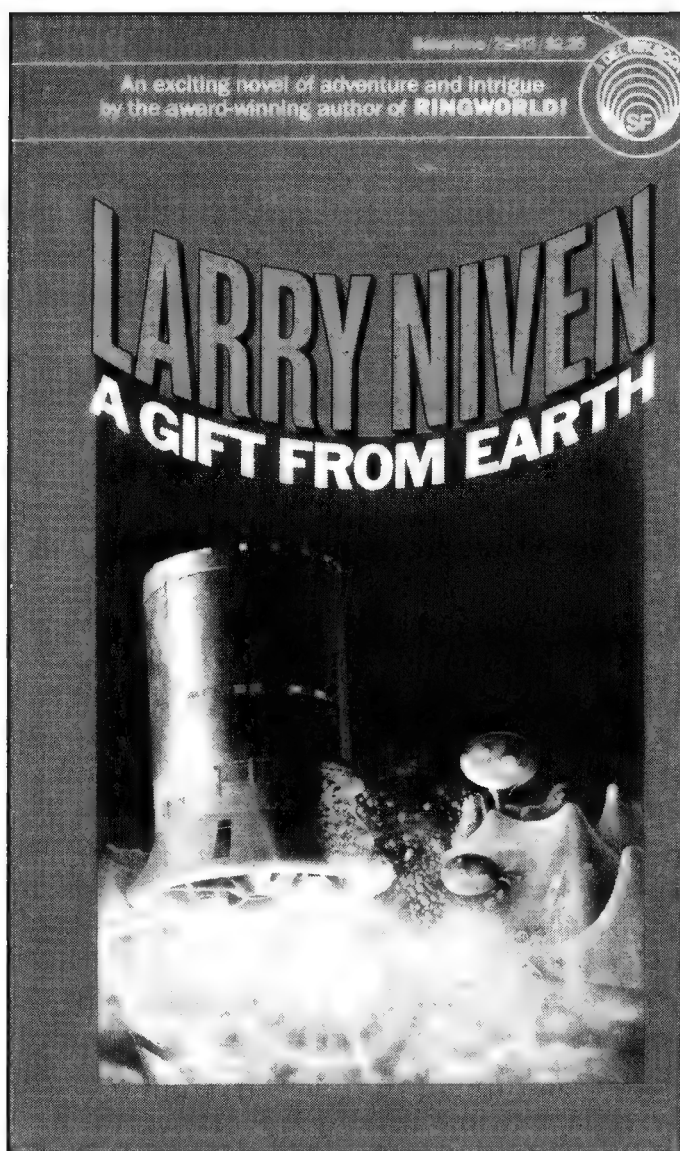
BRUT: *How would we be seeing these "neighbors" in space, if they did exist?*

LN: Our experts suggest that as a species becomes successful, it will expand its population and expand its use of energy until it's using all of the power of the sun. They would have built a home planet system that would be giving off signals we could track with our telescopes, like the Hubble. Even something like a Dyson sphere would give off a heat signature we could see. We'd see something as hot as a star but radiating entirely at the temperature of lukewarm water deep into the red area of the spectrum.

BRUT: *Has SIGMA come up with any other threats we need to be aware of?*

LN: Comets are about one percent of the danger, and you can't do anything about them. *Lucifer's Hammer* still holds. The bigger danger is asteroids, and there are schemes for dealing with them. I like the idea, because it's science fiction-y, of a ship with a powerful motor pushing the asteroid, softly, so it doesn't fracture, just far enough to get it out of the way of the Earth. Or use the gravity of the solar





system to work for you, like a poor man's tractor beam. The problem is like the one in *Lucifer's Hammer*, you have to be concerned with whether the object is breaking into multiple pieces.

BRUT: *I ran across a list of "Niven's Laws" before this conference. One of them was that ethics change with technology. Do you believe a writer has an obligation not to write certain things that they think of because of the potential for misuse?*

LN: That could happen. I don't call that impossible, but I didn't hesitate to write about the organ bank problem when it occurred to me, even though it might have been copied. As it turns out, it probably was

not copied. Somebody thought of it about the same time in China. Governments have been killing prisoners for the organ banks. They may have copied Frederick Pohl and Jack Williamson, who wrote about the same subject before I wrote any of my organ bank stories. But no, as a general thing, I wouldn't hesitate. As a specific thing, I don't doubt there is something that shouldn't be written. I just don't happen to know about anything at the moment.

BRUT: *A lot of the time you're defined by your Ringworld books. Do you sometimes wish someone would pick another one of your works to use as an example of you?*

LN: I certainly wish they'd pick something else for movie possibilities. There is a guy who owns movie rights. He bought them fair and square. He's had them for thirty or forty years, and hasn't done anything with them yet. Unfortunately, I signed a contract with no expiration for the option. There was some serious interest in the *Grendel* stories from *The Legacy of Heorot* and the sequels. They don't even need to put much in to make them convincingly intelligent, because they're not.

BRUT: *If you could take the opportunity to tell all the newer science fiction writers one thing, what would it be?*

LN: You're doing fine, keep it up.

BRUT: *Very good. Thank you very much, Mr. Niven. We appreciate you taking the time to speak with us.*

LN: You're welcome.

Hard Science and the Easier Task of Writing Hard Science Fiction:

An Interview with Wil McCarthy

By Jayme Lynn Blaschke

Wil McCarthy published his first story, "What I Did with OTV Grissom," in *Aboriginal SF* in 1990 and his first novel, *Aggressor Six*, in 1994. Since that time, he has published eight additional novels and more than two dozen short works, earning a reputation as an inventive and rigorous author in the hard science fiction school. His fiction has earned *Nebula Award* and *Theodore Sturgeon Award* nominations and landed on countless recommended reading lists. Wil writes the popular "Lab Notes" science column for the SyFy Channel's website and he has co-founded three high-technology companies: *Galileo Shipyards*, the *Programmable Matter Corporation*, and *RavenBrick*. He lives in Colorado.

BRUTARIAN: What did you want to be when you grew up?

WIL McCARTHY: An astronaut.

BRUT: Astronaut? Good answer!

WM: I kept that plan well into my twenties. I was working at Lockheed-Martin - which at the time was Martin Marietta - and had gotten my bachelor's degree in space engineering. But to be an astronaut you have to have a master's degree, so I was getting my master's degree and getting my scuba certifications. I was planning on moving to Houston and getting a job at the Johnson Space Center. If you're not in the military, your best shot at becoming an astronaut is to work at the crew training area at JSC.

I had plans to do all this, but then I got divorced and the whole thing fell apart. I decided I didn't want to do all of that - get a pilot's license and things - just to have a one percent chance of becoming an astronaut. So, I focused my energies on other things. I became a science fiction writer, which was another aspiration of mine and kind of went from there.

I still have what I like to think of as the world's most impeccable fake astronaut



credentials. I've been to space camp. I've participated in one of those simulated Mars missions in the Utah desert. I got a VIP tour of JSC which was really nice, and I've had VIP tours of other NASA centers before. I scuba dive a lot, so my fake astronaut credentials are beyond reproach. In fact, at one point I pitched a book called *Fake Astronaut*, which *almost* went. I think the thing that killed it finally was the fear that commercial tourist space flights would start before the book had a chance to get out. That didn't happen, but the moment when you could cash in on being a really good fake astronaut was fading, so in the end, the publishers decided that this wasn't a direction they wanted to go. But it came close to being a big project.

BRUT: *You mentioned you got into scuba as part of your astronaut preparation, but do you think if you didn't have that motivation you'd have gotten into scuba anyway?*

WM: Probably, but I wouldn't say definitely. People who scuba dive have different reasons for doing it. Some people just like looking at sea life and stuff like that. For me it was always a gear fetish. I like being underwater. I like having all this equipment around me, the technical challenges of it and things like that. I mean, the reason why I wanted to be an astronaut and the reason why I wanted to be a scuba diver were kind of the same reason, if you see what I mean.

But I didn't stop at basic certification - I went all the way up to rescue diver. That's a lot of training. I was involved for a while just as a hobby, setting up underwater platforms for dive classes and things like that just because I like working underwater. That was a lot of fun.

BRUT: *Other science fiction authors who I've spoke with who scuba, describe it as the closest they're likely to ever come to being in an alien world. Would you agree with this?*

WM: Well, I don't know. The simulated Mars mission I was talking about took place in Hanksville, Utah, where the area is a red rock desert that really does look like Mars. Nothing grows there, not so much because it doesn't rain - it does rain - but the composition of the soil is all clay there. When it rains, the red clay just smothers every living thing. You see plants trying to grow there, but they get buried. It is a very alien-looking landscape.

I've been to Craters of the Moon, which is lava flows that look very alien. I think that scuba diving is one form of alien world, but the Earth is a big place. There are a lot of diverse habitats around.

BRUT: *In an interview of yours from some years back, you mentioned that science fiction was your first love. What was the first science fiction that you read?*

WM: *Danny Dunn and the Smallifying Machine.*

BRUT: *Danny Dunn! I read those myself.*

WM: Yeah. For a lot of people, it was Tom Swift. I never read Tom Swift as a kid. I've circled back as an adult and read a couple of Tom Swift books just so I know what I missed. But for me, it was Danny Dunn.

I guess a few years before that I read a book called *The Haunted Space Suit*, which I guess qualifies, but I wasn't a big reader until I was in fourth grade when I discovered the Danny Dunn books. I devoured them all and went to the librarian and said, "What else you got?" Things kinda progressed from that point.

BRUT: *What influenced you growing up?*

WM: Oh, that's a difficult question. I was growing up in the 70s and early 80s, so there were all the usual ambient cultural influences. Apollo was still very fresh at that time. My father was not a big science fiction

person at all but was hugely impressed with *2001: A Space Odyssey*. He took me to see that movie probably fifteen times when I was growing up. Every time it came to town and was on a big screen, he would go and see it with me. Now, my father was not that much into space, so I'm not sure why he was so obsessed with that movie. He liked airplanes and always wanted me to like airplanes. I never really did. I mean, they're okay, but they just didn't get me excited. It was always space.

When I was a kid, we went to Meteor Crater. Things like that, if it was related to space in some way, I was always really, really interested in.

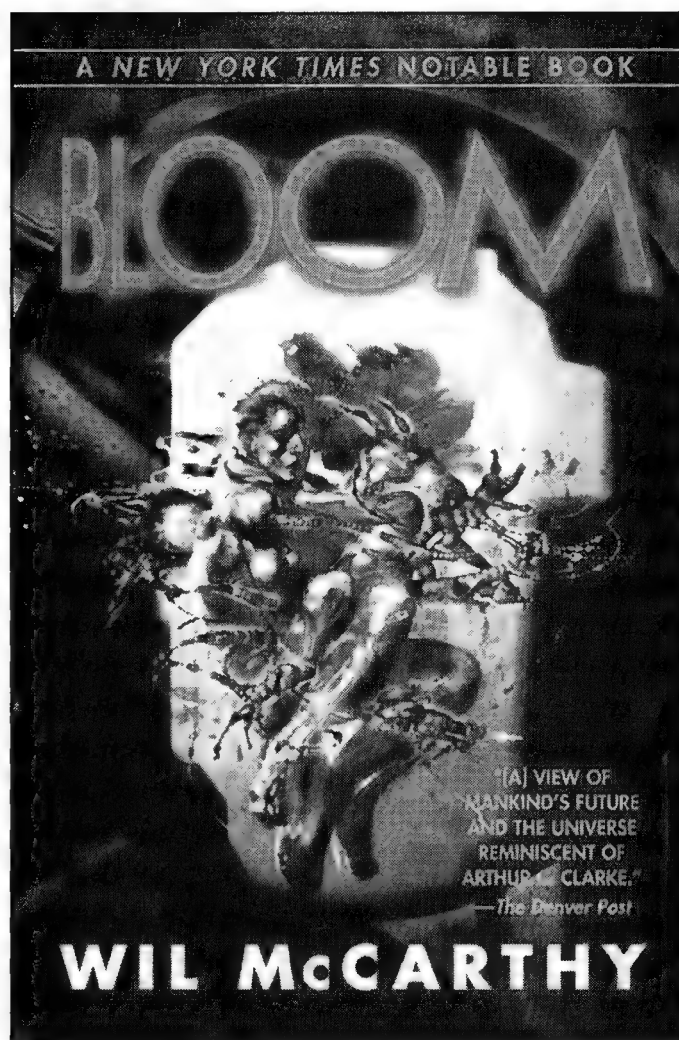
BRUT: *What would your younger self think were he able to look into the future and see your career today? You're involved in a wide array of interests.*

WM: That's a very relevant question. I think about that a lot. I think my younger self would be generally satisfied. Another way to phrase that same question is, does it make a good obituary? When you're dead, are people going to look back on your life and say, "He did it right?" I mean, you have to have the experiences for their own sake as well as for posterity or your inner child.

I guess I'm easily bored, easily distracted . . . hmm. On second thought, I don't know about that. Writing a book requires a lot of focus - you have to do the same thing every day for a year. Running a company requires a lot of focus. I look at people who do the same thing for a whole career, and I don't know how they can do that. I couldn't do that. I couldn't be an accountant or anything like that.

I have been very fortunate, I think, in being able to do a lot of different things. I know the opportunities don't come to everybody. I never fail to thank my lucky stars.

BRUT: *Tell me about Galileo Shipyards.*



For someone steeped in a science fiction background, that's a fairly whimsical company name.

WM: Yeah. It's actually named after a place in one of my books. In a book called *Bloom*, there's a civilization inside the moons of Jupiter. There's a crater on Ganymede called Galileo Crater, and there was a spaceport in this crater. Attached to this spaceport there was a place called Galileo Shipyards, so that was the root of the name. A lot of people ask if that's a Heinlein reference. It's not, actually, but it sounds like that.

Anyway, the actual genesis of Galileo Shipyards - some friends and I got a government contract to design a blimp, and we needed a corporate entity. To be a government contractor, you need to set things up in a certain way, so that was the

purpose of Galileo Shipyards. Then when the programmable matter stuff started to happen, initially there were proposals and things going out under the Galileo Shipyards banner, just because it was an existing corporate entity. We formed a different company called the Programmable Matter Corporation specifically around that IP and then that one got retired as well. We were working for several years designing multifunctional sensors for the aerospace market. We were getting a lot of traction, but it was going to take years before revenue started to flow. That had nothing to do with the merits of the technology - it's just a very slow-paced industry. So we refocused on building materials with a smart window product and a smart wall, various other things like that. We needed a better brand for that industry, so a new entity was formed called RavenBrick. It purchased the assets of the Programmable Matter Corporation. Galileo Shipyards was two whole iterations ago.

BRUT: *Do you ever stop and say, "Wow! How do these things lead into the other?" It's almost like dominoes. You start one and here you are several iterations later, some place completely different.*

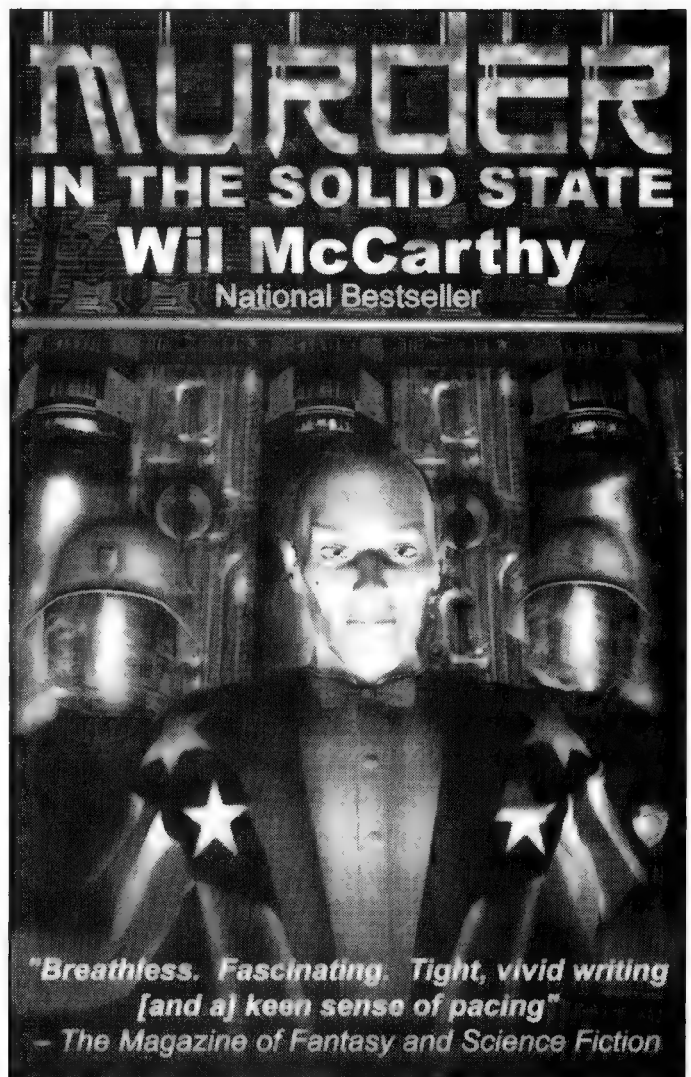
WM: Yes, it is a very distinct sensation. People talk about the hand of God. I'm not a religious person. I don't believe there's a literal hand of God steering us through life, but I know exactly what people mean when they use that phrase, because I frequently feel I'm not so much choosing my path as discovering or even being dragged, sometimes, in different directions. So yeah, I'm very aware of that.

You never know where things are going to lead, particularly when you're discovering something new. It's the norm that you've discovered something different than what you set out to discover. Almost by definition you have to be prepared for the unexpected.

BRUT: *You mentioned programmable matter. This new field of study has taken up a lot of your energies in recent years. Can you explain the concept?*

WM: Sure. The original idea involved quantum dots. A quantum dot is basically a trap for electrons. It's similar to a capacitor for people who know what that is, but it's very, very small. If you trap electrons in a small enough space, they no longer act as particles - they're forced to behave as waves, and that's very similar to the way electrons behave in an atom. So with quantum dots, you can confine electrons in bundles that look like atoms and behave in a lot of ways like atoms, but they don't have a nucleus.

My thought was, "Well, gee, great! Let's use electric fields to pump electrons in and



out of these structures so we can make any atom we want at any time we want.” That was the gist of it. Once you start playing around with ideas like that, you discover there are really several different ways to alter the properties of materials dynamically. Quantum dots are one of four or five different nano-structured material systems that have similar macroscopic effects that - with the influence of temperature, electric fields and magnetism - the behavior of the material can change dramatically.

I think it’s a very powerful concept, because everything that we’ve done in civilization up to this point involves materials that don’t change. If you start to look around at the world around you and say, “Well, what if they could? What if these lights, what if these

windows, what if these walls were dynamic systems that could change on command?” You end up in a programmable world where magic is a word that gets overused, but imagine an environment that responds to the human will, as opposed to simply sitting there as the material it was created as.

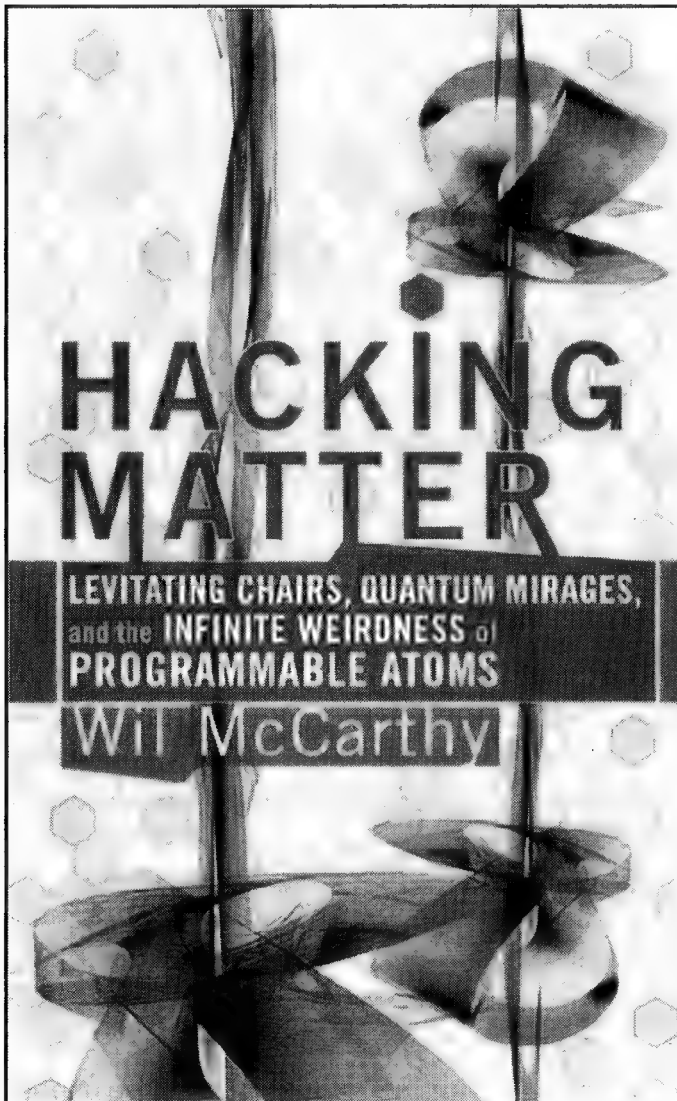
BRUT: *You explore those ideas behind programmable matter in your book Hacking Matter, which brings to mind The Engines of Creation, a book that was highly influential in the development of the then-new field of nanotechnology a decade before.*

WM: Right.

BRUT: *Do you see programmable matter progressing in the same way the nanotech industry has?*

WM: They kind of go together. I mean, I don’t deal with nanomachines at all. I deal with nanostructure materials. But it’s an inevitable consequence when you get down into that scale, materials begin to behave differently. A bulk material versus nano particle, the way that material is going to respond to light, and heat, and magnetism is very different. Whether you’re talking about a mechanical device or whether you’re talking about a material, the distinction at that scale between materials and devices becomes very blurry. You can have arrays of diodes, or arrays of resistors, or things like that which are very small in size, and when you pull back to a wavelength of light, it looks like a continuous material, but in fact, it’s very complicated.

Regardless of what you’re doing on that scale, you face a lot of the same problems, which is that we think we live in a classical Newtonian universe, but we really don’t. That’s an illusion - a statistical illusion. We really live in a quantum mechanical universe, and as you get down to scales of one hundred nanometers or less, that starts to become incredibly important in the way materials behave.



BRUT: *How have your views on programmable matter changed since you first came up with the concept?*

WM: Oh, a lot! It's one thing to talk in theoretical ways about how it could work. One of the things that should've been obvious from the beginning but wasn't, is that these devices are very temperature sensitive. There are two ways to go with that. You can either do a lot of engineering to make that temperature sensitivity irrelevant, or you can go the other way and say, "It's good! We're going to use temperature as one of the mechanisms for controlling these materials. We're going to allow the nature of the material to shift dramatically with temperature."

In any endeavor like this, certain things that look easy turn out to be hard, and certain things that look hard turn out to be easy. Also, when you talk about applications, to me the most powerful thing about programmable matter is the fact that it's programmable, that it can do things that were not even envisioned at the time the material was created. That, to me, is an extremely powerful idea. As a business plan, it doesn't work *at all*. When you're trying to get this stuff out in the real world, you need to do the opposite: very narrowly focused applications. Materials that do two things, for example. We've got a window that turns reflective when it gets hot. Everyone understands why you would want to do that - you want to keep the heat out when it's hot outside so the window turns reflective. Those are the applications that you can sell, that you can easily commercialize. The idea that it's all things to all people just doesn't fly.

BRUT: *Do you find writing non-fiction different for you than writing fiction?*

WM: It is different, yes. I don't think I use a different part of my brain. When you're writing hard science fiction, you have to have your science details right anyway.

There's a skill set that I think science fiction writers tend to develop: How do I explain this concept? The story doesn't make any sense if I don't explain the concepts behind it, but I have to explain those concepts without slowing the story down. You learn to quickly get the idea out there in bits and pieces so that people understand it, but then you also have to write the story. The story has to be interesting, the characters have to be compelling and empathetic and all that stuff.

When you're writing non-fiction, you don't have to worry about all that. You're just doing the infodump part of a science fiction story. To me, that's a lot easier.

BRUT: *You do a lot of non-fiction writing. You've done your "Lab Notes" science column for quite a long time, and you've pushed the envelope quite a bit in that venue. What's the most absurd topic you've addressed?*

WM: I've been doing "Lab Notes" for ten years now - May, 2009 was my tenth anniversary. When it first started out, it was different. It was more of a science column: here's what's going on in science this month. But over time, I've got a pretty good database of what people respond to and what they don't. It was always set up so that people could send me email, and now with the new way the site is structured, they can post comments. There's direct feedback from the readers about what they're enjoying and what they aren't.

The columns that work best are sort of *Star Trek* apologies. All right, let's assume that everything we see in this movie is real. How do we explain what we're seeing on the screen? Sometimes, that doesn't work. Sometimes, I just have to pan a movie and say, "None of this makes any sense. *At all.*" But it's more fun to say, "Okay, if we really did blow up this planet, how did we do that?" Or, "If we really did make zombies, how would we do that?"

The frustration comes in when there are some months when there's just nothing very interesting to write about. A couple times a year, the world will just hand me a topic that's perfect. One I know I can run with, and I know the audience is going to love. In a dry month, I've got to write about *Stargate* or something that doesn't offer the kind of fodder for good apologists' writing.

BRUT: *Your last novel was To Crush the Moon. That was a few years ago. What's been going on in the interim?*

WM: Running a company takes a lot of time, and because we're spending other people's money - we're not profitable yet - there's both a fiduciary duty and an ethical duty to give those people good value for their investment. That limits the amount

of writing I can find the time to do.

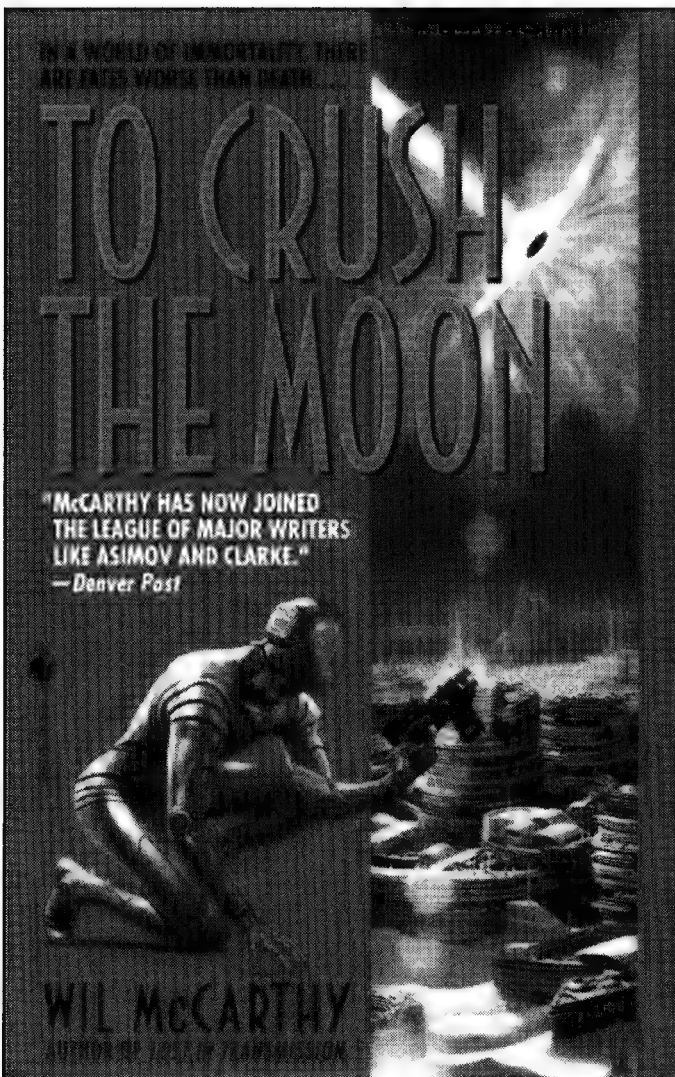
Also, a lot of what I've been doing is by invitation. This is strange, but there are government agencies, private companies, and foundations that have hit on the idea of using science fiction to explain things. For example, a government agency can kick out an eighty-page report about something. The report is very dry, and nobody is going to read it and they say to themselves, "Why did we do this?" A lot of times, you can take the information in that eighty-page report and express it in a fifteen-page science fiction story that gets all the same points across but in a way that's easy to read and easy to follow. There's actually quite a lot of work out there for this sort of private-label fiction that's not intended for public consumption. The pay is really good, but it doesn't advance your reputation any. For whatever reason, I've been doing a lot of that for the past couple of years.

BRUT: *So do you have anything on the publishing horizon?*

WM: Not at the moment, no. I've kicked around some book ideas. One of the obvious things is that at some point, I'm going to write a book about my experiences with the company. That's what I live and breathe every day, and if I can't make it an interesting, exciting, and relevant book out of that, I should just hang up my pen.

BRUT: *You have a significantly smaller body of short fiction work than novel-length work. Are your story ideas simply novel-length concepts?*

WM: I think it's actually a lot shallower than that. There's no money in short fiction. It's something you do for love or to show off. I guess some people do it to chase after awards and things like that, and all of that is fine, but with limited resources it's always easier to find the time for something that's going to pay \$50,000 than something that's going



to pay \$800. The same thing applies to non-fiction. Generally speaking, the market for non-fiction pays a lot better than the market for fiction. Writing for *Wired*, for example, you could do just that and make a living, whereas short fiction, that's not the case.

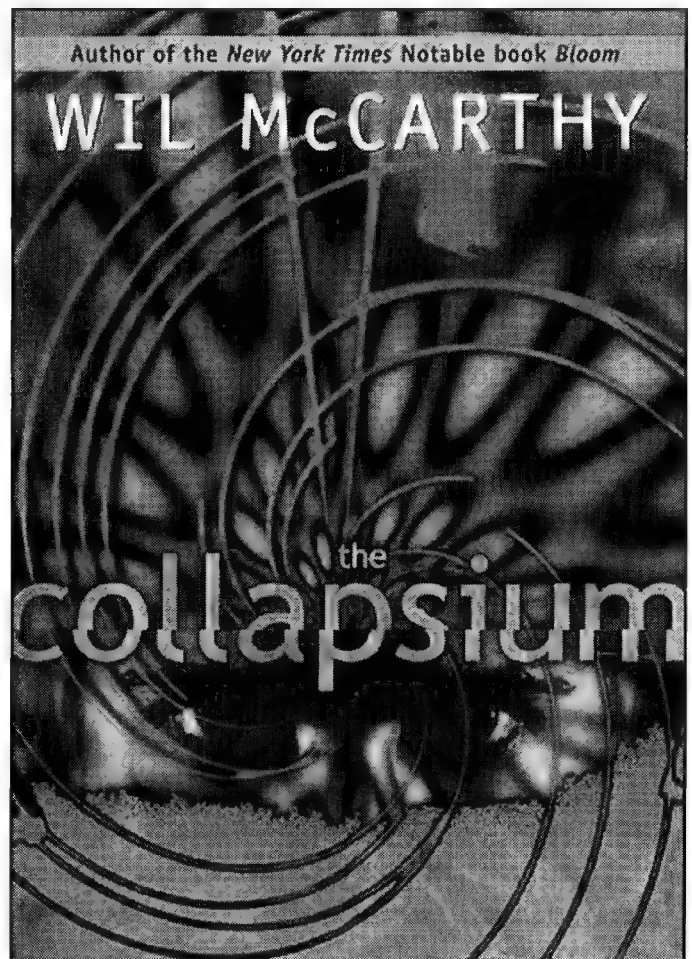
One of the things I've done - not so much anymore - I did a lot of fake articles that sort of split the difference between short fiction and non-fiction. Ridiculous, absurdist articles with fake science behind them. For whatever reason, there are a lot of serious magazines that will run articles like that where they wouldn't run fiction *per se*. It's just a way to get paid more for doing the same thing.

BRUT: *That makes me wonder . . . Jack Williamson said once he was very disappointed that the Big Bang theory had won out over the Steady State theory. Is it viable to write hard SF using discredited or obsolete scientific theory?*

WM: Oh, absolutely! I think that's a great milieu. A guy named Richard Garfinkle wrote a book called *Celestial Matters*, which was a hard science fiction novel set in the Platonic universe. The universe is small; it surrounds the Earth; it's a series of nested geometric shapes with the stars affixed to them. I thought that was a terrific book. The exercise of hard science fiction is not so much using the science of right now, because for all we know, the science of right now is going to be discredited anyway. It's more about following the rules. You lay down what the rules are for this particular story, and you operate strictly within those rules. All the problem solving your characters do has to be consistent with the laws of physics as this particular story sees them. It can be hard science fiction without having to adhere strictly to what's known today.

BRUT: *Looking back at your novels, you've written stand-alone as well as series work. Do you find any difference between the two?*

WM: Definitely. For example, my novel *The Collapsium* was intended as a stand-alone work, but by the time I was done with it - even before I was done writing it - I realized all of the solutions to the problems of that book were going to kick off much, much bigger problems in their own right. Those problems were going to unfold over a very long period of time. So the sequel to *The Collapsium* is arguably one long book - it's three long books, really. The genesis of that is, basically, these people were immortal. They weren't going to grow old and die. In our world today, we can create these long-term pyramid schemes that are going to go horribly wrong sometime in the future, but that's okay, because we'll be dead. That's a valid way to solve problems in a mortal world. You can say, "Well, even the Roman Empire doesn't last forever." But when people are immortal, if you do things that upset the long-term stability of your society, and you personally have to live through those



consequences, you end up in a situation where individual people actually live longer than the societies around them. That's a big idea. That's a long-winded sort of idea. You can't do that in a short story.

It's not that I wanted to write a series, it's that the idea couldn't be contained in anything less than three long books.

BRUT: *Do you have, fictionally speaking, a dream project that you haven't yet tackled?*

WM: Oh, sure. I'd like to make a movie out of *The Collapsium*. I think that'd be a lot of fun. I don't know if that's ever going to happen. I'm not talking about selling the rights - I'm talking about doing the whole project, like Howard Hughes did with *Hell's Angels*. Some day I'd like to be a gazillionaire and fund my own movie projects. That would be really neat.

BRUT: *You're also something of a language junkie. You speak German, Japanese, and Esperanto. What's the story behind learning an invented language like Esperanto? Are you a big fan of Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rat novels?*

WM: Well, you know, Esperanto, the first thing that attracted me to it is that it's fairly easy to learn. It's not very useful, unfortunately, but it's something you can pick up on your own. You can buy, over the Internet, Esperanto books and Esperanto movies.

BRUT: *Esperanto movies starring William Shatner.*

WM: Yes, exactly! There are Esperanto chat rooms where you can go and hang out. I haven't done any of that in a long time. I just thought it was an interesting project to engage in. But I've always been interested in language. I read a lot of linguistics books. I'm interested in how languages change over time, how they split off from one another. If

I could go back in time, one of the more interesting things to do with a time machine would be to go back to the first tribe of people from whom we're all descended - the mitochondrial Eve tribe - and just hear what they're speaking. Hear what their language sounds like. Because

every language on Earth is a descendant of that language.

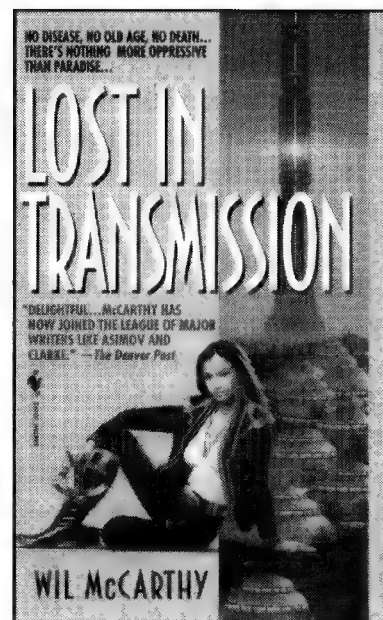
BRUT: *You're also a fan of roller hockey. Where did that interest come from?*

WM: Everyone needs a sport or a physical activity they engage in. I like hockey because it's fast-paced. It's violent, but it's controlled violence. Roller hockey is appealing because the speeds are higher and, on ice, it's a little bit easier to stop and to turn because you've got these blades that dig in. Of course, when you fall on ice, you keep going. If you fall on a roller hockey floor, you stop. The physics of roller hockey, I think, are more appealing. Plus, I'm a huge fan of *Rollerball*, the original movie. I always like to imagine I'm playing rollerball when I'm playing hockey.

I'm getting older, though. I'm not playing hockey nearly as much as I used to. You start to accumulate injuries over time that don't go away. I have fingers that don't work well anymore, stuff like that. There's only so much you can do in a human lifetime, but yeah, I do love roller hockey.

BRUT: *You love it, but are you any good at it?*

WM: [laughs] No.



BLOCK

By Glen Alan Hamilton

Back at my house, people I don't even know are dying.

On my lawn a body, probably male, maybe not, maybe a girl with really short hair and big legs is screaming, and there is something stuck in her, through her, and the blood is squirting from her back in long vicious streams so she looks almost like a fountain.

In the front room, a man is clutching his chest, and the metal object embedded there is a letter opener. The woman next to him is trying to pull it out, but one of her hands is missing the fingers, and they are on the floor in front of both of them, and I think one of the fingers is still moving.

Behind them, in the kitchen, a meat cleaver is sticking out from the skull of another woman, and maybe it's what cut the other woman's fingers off, maybe not. There's a butcher knife on the floor next to her, and there's another woman next to her, to it, and she's applying pressure to the wound in her eye, where it used to be, where maybe the butcher knife was before.

She is screaming, the man and the woman in the front room are screaming, and others,

most of them splattered with blood I think isn't their own, are screaming.

A woman on the floor in front of the TV is holding her hand, and it's bent back and flopping, and she's trying to point with it. She's staring dazed and blank, and isn't screaming, and her eyes are welling up with tears. She's pleading, trying to say something, and the other woman, the one with missing fingers, is pointing too, and the man is falling, and both of them, all of them that aren't running, are looking.

At me.

I'm looking and in my hands, someone's neck is thick and squishy and snapping, and his body is falling and slumping onto the carpet, and something is falling from his hand, and I see it and it's a book.

My book.

And I realize it's a party, my party. At my house. And I'm realizing I've done this, all of it, and I should have known it was coming, should have seen it because it started before, started with the book, but more than that, and not here, not now.

It all started with this:

The blank page.
Empty.
White.
Full of nothing.
The blank fucking page.

Full of nothing, and blinding white like a snowstorm when you can't see the lines in the road, but you know they're there, know they're out there somewhere, but *you can't see them, can't find them*, and there's no end in sight, and worse.

So much worse.
No beginning.

The blank page.

White.

And full of nothing.
I'd never been hypnotized before.
But we'll talk about that later.

We've got to go back.

All about

going back.

#

I'm a writer.

A horror writer to be exact, and that's what this is all about, really.

Writing. Writing horror, the horror of not being able to write. The horror of not being. If you're a writer, you know what that means.

I do. I did. I was good at it. My first book was a best seller. The second and third made the Top Ten. The fourth, well let's just say *the critics loved it*. We'll just say that because my agent says I should say that, and hey, let's be honest. Having someone like what you do, let alone say something nice about it is great, but let's be more honest. Having a lot of people read it, whether they like it or not, is a whole lot better.

Anthony Westerburg of the *New York Times* said I had "a great voice." Somebody else, whose name I should know so I can put it down here so you'll think I'm important, said, "Anderson spills words on the page like honey dripping on a soft summer day." Not bad, huh? Yeah, and I should know his name so I can say

he's a great writer too, but I don't, and that's part of the problem. I got too full of myself, and that boils down to *I got full of shit*. We'll talk more about my major character flaws later.

I was rolling, or at least making a pretty decent living, and that's pretty much all four wheels on go in the literary world. I didn't write every day. I didn't have to. The ideas just came when they came, and the wheels turned, and I rolled and so did they, and that was that.

But it wasn't and they didn't.

Roll, that is. Turn, that is. As a matter of fact, they pretty much came to a screeching fucking halt.

I didn't think much of it at first.

I'd had dry spells before. But not like this. Not as long as this. I'd sit down in my study, roll up my sleeves (not really, I'm using imagery here, people), and stare at the computer screen, just waiting. Waiting. Waiting.

Waiting.

And, nothing.

My wife was supportive.

"Steve," she would say, as she always did, in that sweet voice that said I understand, but not really, so I'll pretend, "you'll get over this. Give it a day or two. You'll see."

I tried. I waited. I tried to see, and what I saw was a day or two turn into weeks.

I stopped trying *to see* and tried to take my mind off of it. I went for walks. I did some signings. I shopped. I went to the mall, and I looked at the people and tried to *absorb* and *connect*, and went back to my study, and there it was, the paper, and I tried *to see*, and all it did was stare back at me. I tried, and what I saw, and what I did, and what I was, was the same thing that was on the paper. Nothing. White, blank, and I tried, oh, I really, really tried, but nothing, *nothing* came.

I read (all the books said you should always *read, read, read* when you're a writer, don't they, oh yes, they do) and I finished fifty books by fifty people who could actually *do* their job, and some of them were really good, and all I got was pissed off. I was good. I could write. I could *do* this. I'd done this. I'd written some things that were on the verge of greatness,



Illustration by Gavin Delint

and I could do it again. Couldn't I? Sure I could. *Sure* I could.

I rewrote some old stories, and I made them worse. I wrote lists in broken paragraphs that made no sense. I wrote poems that didn't rhyme, and the page laughed and mocked me, and it did this by saying nothing. I hate the silent treatment.

Two months went by, and Karen tried to stay supportive. Dear, sweet Marty kept bugging me about what I was working on, and I lied, and hey, he's just doing his job like any good agent, and keep me posted will ya? Sure, I told him. *Sure, I will buddy. What I'm working on right now is fantastic, don't worry. It's actually scaring me. Blinding. Page after page that you could look at, time and time again, and never really get the full meaning, you know? Deep, really deep, and I'll call you, I will.*

I kept reading. Non-fiction this time, and I read all about writer's block, and breaking through, and *blah, blah, blankety blah*, and it wasn't really helping. I typed out grocery lists, and tried to *describe* the vegetables just like one of the good books said, and we ate really well, and still nothing. I wrote to music, *without* music, *about* music. I actually tried copying my first book, and changing a few things here and there, and the here and there went nowhere, and I couldn't even do that. Karen was getting nervous, and I told her everything would be okay.

Just a slump, honey.

Four months later.

Just a slump. I could do this. Yeah, sure I could.

I started going to the library a lot.

I started reading books about everything, anything, tried to immerse myself in paper, in the smell, the feel of why I fell in love with the written word in the first place. I tried writing on notebook paper, and I threw crumpled balls of emptiness onto the floor in my study until it looked like it had snowed. I started getting scared, really scared, and not in the way that would help me write. I was a semi-famous horror writer, and I was pissing in my pants every time that damned page stared back

at me. I decide maybe I need to come clean, maybe I need to cleanse myself of something, and I call Marty.

Marty told me how he used to represent Alan Davidson, and of course, I knew this. I knew him. He outsells me, the prick, and Marty told me Alan *went through a stretch*, and Alan said it was like remembering a dream. It was like remembering the fragments of something, and it was right there, and he just couldn't reach it, only it wasn't like that. It was like remembering a nightmare because he could remember some of it, wanted to touch it, get it out, put it down, but he was afraid to. I lied, and told him I understood.

I lied because he just doesn't get it. It's not that I'm afraid. It's not that I wouldn't gladly jump into the nightmare if I could, because I can't. He just doesn't get it.

It's like I'm sleeping all the time, and there's nothing there but the white, and I can never, ever dream.

#

Five months, and I decided to get some outside help. I took the last ditch effort of the clueless and the helpless. I picked a name out of the phone book.

So let's change this, shall we? Let's change the tense. Let's change the style. Let's change everything about this, and everything else I've written, and everything about me. This is how this happened.

I'm in Dr. VanDersen's office, and he's looking at me, stroking his beard, and adjusting his round glasses that don't look thick enough to be real. He's looking like something straight out of some casting call for some fifties or sixties cliché-ridden movie, and it's just adding to the whole surreal feel of the thing when he starts saying in a thick accent that sounds fake, "Have you ever been hypnotized?"

He's looking at me with those glasses, and maybe they really are thick because his eyes are looking huge, like lights burning through me, and he's saying, "Maybe you've just lost it." I'm sitting up now, getting offended, and he's smiling like he knew I'd do this, and he's saying, "You're older now. Maybe you've just

lost your sense of why you write. Maybe you've just lost your sense of wonder."

I'm about to say something, and he's silencing me with a look, without saying anything, and then he's actually saying, "It happens. We get older. We pay bills. We fuck, we suck, we see the secrets, and they become the norm, and there gets to be nothing left. There gets to be no Santa Claus, and no Easter Bunny, and ghosts are nothing more than creaky boards in an old house, and all you can think about is how much it will cost to repair the floor, instead of what might actually be making the noise. Or worse. You don't have to think about the money. You've come so far in life you don't have to worry about anything. You stop believing in other things because you believe in yourself too much, and a man without fear of anything can't find the fear in himself," and he's pausing and smiling, and he's saying, "and he certainly can't bring it out in other people."

I'm sitting up and saying nothing, and Dr. VanDersen is leaning forward in a way that's making me involuntarily lean back, and he's asking with a smile that is slight but seems big, "Do you remember being young?"

I'm going to a shrink, and I wouldn't call Dr. VanDersen that since he's almost twice my size, and he's saying, "Would you like to try something?" and I'm saying, "Yes."

#

I'd never been hypnotized before. I said that before, right?

He told me I needed to go back. *Back*. Further, to when I was a small, and I remember this, not back to when I was young or when I was a small child, but back to when I was *small*. That was the word he used. *Small*. He said I had to go back to what made me *open* to things. To what scared me. To maybe what made me wonder what scared other people. To what maybe made me want to scare people back.

He talked and I listened. And the shiny little watch swung in front of me like a pendulum, and it made me think of heads chopped off of shoulders and rolling into baskets, and my eyes rolled back, and his voice disappeared

inside my head, and then his fingers went *snap*.

Snap.

And things started to happen after this.

At home I put on masks and waited for Karen, and jumped out at her, and listened for her yelp. I covered myself in Karo syrup mixed with red food coloring, and curled up in the tub for her to find me, and she yelled at me. I bought a devil costume with little red horns, and hid in the closet, and came out in the dark, and she jumped up and she screamed. She screamed, and once or twice she punched me in the arm, and once or twice she ran out of the room, and I'm telling you I did these things because of what happened next.

I started writing again.

It wasn't anything great at first. Scribbles, ideas, but the wheels were turning. I took breaks. I took walks in the park, and the sun seemed brighter, and the sky looked bluer, and things looked bigger, while I ate candy bars. I skipped rocks on the lake, and they went *zing*, and I accidentally broke someone's window. A dog barked at me, and I barked back, and he ran. I bent over a homeless man, and he asked me for money, and I said I don't have any money, mister, honest. He said your honesty is resounding, and I said honesty is the resonance and beauty of a shotgun blast searing open a church full of sinners, and spit on him, and the look on his face was priceless. He started crying, and I told him innocence is just another way of saying you haven't been caught yet.

I wrote a short story, and it sold.

I was happy. Karen was happy but acting strange, and wanted to know why I wasn't using the computer, and I shut the door and kept writing, and broke all my pencils, and bought more so I could. Tommy kept calling and I told him chill, because I'd started writing this new book, and it's really cool.

I couldn't sleep. Karen wouldn't let me keep the hall light on, and I wanted it on because I thought I heard something in the closet, and something under the bed kept growling.

I wrote more. I wrote a lot more.

I left my clothes on the floor, and Karen

got mad, and I giggled, and I wrote more. She told me to get some sleep, and I told her she wasn't my boss, and she said she was happy I was working but I needed to take a break, and I stuck my tongue out at her when she turned her back, and I wrote more. Our neighbor's puppy disappeared, and I don't know what happened to it, I really don't, and I started writing a whole book.

Dr. VanDersen was happy, too, but he said he was worried. He said one of his patients complained because I stuck a spider in her purse in the waiting room. I told him that was funny, you should have seen her face. He told me things were dangerous, things like this. Children were more open to things, and some people think it's why they see monsters in the closet, because things are actually more attuned to youth, *spirit* things, *evil* things, and I said he was weird. I told him he probably didn't even believe in Santa Claus. He probably never burned ants on the sidewalk with a magnifying glass, and he said I should be careful, and I told him I was writing more than ever, more than I ever had, and I said I'm not small, I'm not small at all. I'm big, I'm a big writer, and he asked me what that smell was, and I said you pooped your pants — I didn't, you did.

He said it was more than that, more than these *antics*, I think he said. (Isn't that a funny word? *Antics*.) He said some people believed you could go back *too far* in the mind. Back to primitive thoughts, back to the caveman, the animal in us, and I growled at him, and he jumped, and I laughed. He said I didn't understand. He said he made a mistake. He said maybe I wrote as a way to cover my fears, not bring them out. Maybe I wrote as a way for my adult mind to deal with things. Maybe over the years I accumulated things, and hid things, and maybe pretend things hid things from my past I didn't know, or maybe it was something else. Maybe it was stripping too much away. (*Stripping? Whoo hoo!*). Maybe it was exposing too much. (Exposing too much? Pervert. *You're a pervert. Look at my dingle. See it jingle*). Maybe it was, and is, a conflict of the adult mind and the child mind. Childish,

small minds, they don't understand. They can't rationalize (*oh, big word, big man*) right and wrong, and they only understand demands. It's why you don't give children guns, and I said, "Well, that's good, because I've got a gun in my coat right now, motherfucker, so fuck off!" and I left, and never went back.

I finished the book.

I was happy. Karen was a happy. Marty was happy. Everybody was happy. *Happy, happy, happy*. Marty said we should throw a party. Invite some people to maybe get me more money, a better deal, maybe make a movie, and I told him I liked movies, and I wanted to keep writing but I needed more crayons, and maybe we could not build a fire because I don't like fire. Karen told me to clean up, to straighten up because my posture was bad, and I spit at her behind her back, and then the people started coming over. Lots of people. Too many people.

#

Back at my house, people are still dying.

And some are still screaming and running, and some are dying, and some are not dying, and I'm remembering them being there earlier. I'm remembering them laughing, and drinking, and slapping me on the back, and not liking it. I'm remembering some people lighting cigarettes, and flames and smoke, and Karen telling Marty I was going to take a long vacation after this. Karen was telling Marty she was going to make me stop writing, going to take away my crayons and make me stop, and I was telling her no. I was telling her no, no, no. I was telling her I have to keep writing, and I remember crying, and screaming, and I remember the blood, and the yelling, and I'm looking at the woman on the floor with the bent hand, and I'm remembering. I remember Karen.

She looks blank.

Her eyes are still pleading, and I pick up the book on the floor and look at it.

I look at her and a tear is rolling down her cheek, and she tries to smile and say something to me, and I raise the book over my head and start smashing her skull with it.

Sirens are wailing outside.

They're wailing. Wailing, daddy. Turning.
Turning like wheels. Red like fire.

Screaming.

Screaming, screaming, screaming, and I'm
leaning over her body, and I'm looking at her
skull, at the wound there, and it's like a cave,
and it's the back, the mind, the place where all
the ideas are.

It's not black anymore, it's

white

and blank

and deep

and full of everything.

And I'm dipping my fingers there, and
I'm looking at them, red and runny, and I'm
slumping to the floor, and facing the wall, and
smiling.

And with those fingers, I'm writing

and I'm writing the best thing *ever*.

THE CROOK

By Michael J. Varhola

My home in Paris was a room about twice as big as a typical closet, a ninth-floor walkup, about three-and-a-half blocks from the Eiffel Tower, and four or five from the Quay D'Orsay and the River Seine. These lodgings, at the end of a maze-like hallway, contained a bed, a closet, and a sink. I shared a toilet across the hall with a middle-aged, alcoholic French couple, a German mime, and a colony of women and children from an island off the coast of West Africa. I had a large window above my table that looked out onto Avenue Rapp, and a tiny one above my bed that looked across an alley at the *chambres de bonne* - "maids' quarters" - of the neighboring building.

Often, my first meal of the day was a pastry and cup of coffee at the American Express Café (a bar that served as a student union for us), and I frequently had my dinner at a cheap restaurant or bought it from an Arab street vendor. Most of my meals, however, I prepared on a hot plate and ate in my room, often with a friend or two. Because I had no refrigerator, and little space to store food, most days I had to make forays into the streets one hundred feet below for staples: bread, beer, wine, cheese, milk. During the winter, however, I had a bit more flexibility and could keep perishables

in a small basket that hung outside the tiny window above my bed.

One day in early 1989, I invited a girlfriend up to my room for lunch. Having friends accept invitations for lunch wasn't usually a challenge, but getting them to ascend nine flights of stairs once they discovered where I lived, sometimes was. She was, nonetheless, a good sport, and had been to my place before, and we made the long climb up the stairs together, pausing near the top to look out the back of the building toward faraway Montmartre, where Sacre Coeur perched gray and phantasmal.

Upon reaching my room, I offered her one of my two chairs and set about making lunch, unpacking the cheese and bread I had just bought, and hastening to the window to retrieve the more-expensive-than-usual bottle of wine I had chilling in the basket.

It was gone.

I thought back to the night before and clearly remembered putting it there in anticipation of the following day's repast. Wondering if it might somehow have been knocked out of the basket, I stepped up onto my bed and then leaned out through the narrow window, and looked into the cobbled alley nine stories below.



Photos from Michael Varhola

There was, however, no sign of shattered glass. I looked across the alley at the adjacent building and its counterpart to my own corner room, noting that it was a full ten feet away or more, too far for someone to reach over and snatch anything. Baffled, I came back in, stepped off the bed, and, amid lame apologies, made a quick search of my room. Deprived of wine, the lunch proceeded and ended cordially, but by no means passionately.

Over the next few weeks, my provender more and more frequently disappeared, but only from my basket. From this I concluded it unlikely that any of the rabble I shared the upper floor of the building with had found access to my room; if they had, they probably would have stolen more than just the things hanging outside my window - and more than just food. Beset by an increasing sense of surreality, I was torn between putting items into the basket, knowing they might disappear, and not storing things in it and having to go out every time I needed something. Endless perusals above, below, and all around the basket revealed nothing.

One day, while somewhat apprehensively putting several cold items into the basket for a party I was hosting the following night, I caught a flicker of movement in the window of the room across the alley. I looked up but saw only a shadowy figure receding into the darkness beyond, a halo of green, yellow, and red upon its head. Startled, I retreated into my own room and contemplated what I had seen. It was then that some intimation of what had been happening dawned on me, and then I began to fashion a plan of discovery and - ultimately, perhaps - retribution.

I stayed in my room throughout the rest of the day, studying with my lights on. As night fell, I washed up in my sink, got dressed, turned off the lights, and left my room, closing but not locking my door. A minute or so later, I slid open the door and crawled back into my room. I kept as far from the side window as possible, and stationed myself, in the darkness, just across from it, prepared to wait as long as need be for something to happen. I did not have to wait long.

I could see a man leaning out of his window, a long stick in his hands. From his appearance, I guessed he was probably from some former French colony in Africa or the Caribbean, and he sported a huge mushroom of multi-colored wool upon his head. A small loop of cord hung from the stick.

Guiding his crook unerringly to my bottle of wine, he lowered the loop of cord around it, tightened it with the end of cord that trailed back toward the butt of the stick, and plucked the bottle of wine from the basket, pulling it back into his lair. He started to repeat the procedure with my other provisions. Outraged, I leapt into action, tore open the window, grabbed at the stick, and - having gained the advantage - dragged it back into my room. Caught off guard, he retreated into his own chamber.

"Yankee bastard!" he cried, shaking his fist and choking upon his words, indignant beyond decency that I had finally foiled his attempts.

I laughed out loud, elated.

"Fuck you!" I yelled, guffawing. Victory.

But it was not to be that easy. He simply got another stick and, naively, I attempted to ambush him once again. Grabbing his stick and pulling, I realized that he had it tied with a piece of rope around his arm so that I could not take it away again. As I loosened my grip on it, he counterattacked, slamming the end of the crook into my face, smashing my lips, and nearly breaking my nose. I fell to the floor, tasting blood, and choking with pain and rage. I could hear him laughing as he stole my food once again.

Our conflict escalated over the following weeks. I achieved several minor victories, but suffered even more humiliating defeats. Most galling, was looking across the alley, and seeing him devouring with his friends something I had procured with my limited resources. But I was resolute and determined to take the war to its final, necessary conclusion.

One especially cold night during this time, I was sitting with my friend C. in a tiny, lonely garden owned by the Theosophical Society, the headquarters for which were near the end of the alley through an unassuming doorway. This





garden, probably just three or four times the size of my room, was dominated by an ancient fig tree, and lay behind a perpetually locked wrought iron fence. C. and I had a special love for the little place, and would periodically scale the fence and sit upon the stone bench under the fig tree, drinking wine or beer. Tonight, as we passed a bottle of cheap *vin rouge* and shivered in the darkness, I confided to him the horrors of the past weeks and, enjoining him to secrecy, begged for his assistance. I showed him some equipment I had recently bought at the Porte de Clignancourt flea market at the north end of the city and told him a plan I had conceived. Labeling it “zesty,” he agreed to aid me, and we set about hammering out the details.

Leaving the garden, we seized the green steel dumpster at the head of the alley and positioned it directly below my window. Then,

proceeding to a construction site near the river, we loaded our backpacks full of bricks, lugged them back to my building, carefully sneaked past the concierge’s apartment, and dragged them painfully up the stairs to my room. We had to stop and rest at each landing, gasping breathlessly, and sharing a second bottle of red wine for fortification.

Reaching my room, nearly exhausted, we placed the backpacks of bricks on the ledge of my tiny window, and fastened their straps together with one end of a heavy chain. At the other end of the chain we hung a large padlock, which we left open.

After resting briefly, we stocked my basket with wine, milk, and cheese. We then dimmed the lights, leaving only a small lamp on, and, in full view of the window, sat down in front of the scorching radiator to drink another bottle of wine and listen to music, the strains of

which carried through the open window.

We sat for a longish time, nearly an hour I think, and it was well past midnight before I glimpsed a flash of movement outside my window, and recognized the tell-tale shadow of the crook as its noose tightened about some of my food.

"Now!" I yelled, hurtling toward the window, C. close behind me. Reaching the open window, I grabbed onto the crooked stick with one hand and fumbled with the open padlock with the other, my hands shaking uncontrollably from wine, cold, and adrenaline. The thief laughed, anticipating another easy victory, and started to slam the pole into my chest, knocking the labored breath from my lungs. I wedged the padlock around the pole and forced it shut with both hands. "Now, C.," I hissed desperately. "Do it now!"

My friend was already heaving at the laden bookbags, struggling to push them off the ledge. I pushed at them too, frantically, with my arms, gasping for air, my hands shaking so badly they were useless to me. The bags slid off the ledge, and C. and I lurched forward into the tiny window opening.

For an instant, time seemed to stand still, and the bags appeared to momentarily hang in mid-air. The crooked man across the alley let go of the stick, but this was futile as it was firmly bound to his arm. Time sped up again, and his gloating laugh transformed into a shriek of horror, his eyes and teeth bright as frost.

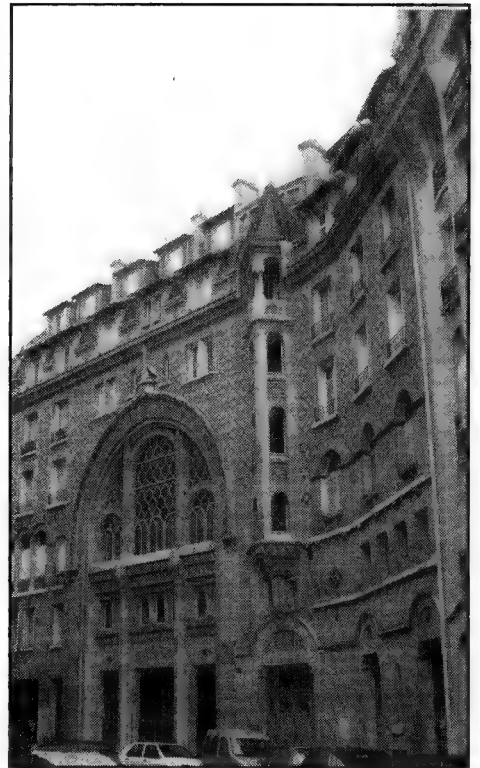
The heavy bookbags shot through the void with the stick, securely chained to them, in tow. My neighbor was torn from his window, like a worm from a hole, and flew out into the space of the alleyway. His face came very near to mine as he began his short downward flight, a look of agony and desperation twisting his features. As he disappeared into the void, a resounding metallic clang indicated that the bags had found their mark inside the dumpster, followed immediately by a crunching thump. In the dim light that filtered into the alley from the street lamps, we could see his woolen hat, fluttering down through the darkness like some polychromatic jellyfish. Snow fell

in small, cold flakes, the first and only of the season.

Disbelief overwhelmed us, and we quickly left my room for a nearby café, careful not to walk past the alley on our way out or back. We had originally considered any number of additional steps that variously

included trying to retrieve our bookbags, closing the lid of the dumpster, or even throwing some additional trash on top of what our actions had contributed to the container. Now, however, we did not have the nerve to do anything but keep as far away as possible from the dumpster and its contents.

We returned late, thoroughly inebriated, and collapsed in a state of exhaustion. Sometime near dawn, I woke briefly to hear the squeaks and grindings of a large trash truck, followed by a loud bang as it set the empty container back onto the street. Pulling my pillow over my head, I drifted back into a contented sleep as the truck rumbled off down the street. When I woke up, I knew, there would be a cold bottle of milk waiting for me in the basket outside my window.



Gold Token

By Stephen Goldsmith

Michael walks along the puddled street, chin dipped into the collar of his jacket, hands sunken deep into the pockets, while the rain pelts down around him as if the gods are working on a sequel to Noah's Ark. His aged hiking boots splash in a gully of rainwater as he raises a hand to scratch at an imaginary itch on his cheek, covering his face as he passes Bobby's Bakery – his favourite haunt for coffee and cake. Not today, however, despite the sweet smelling Danish pastries in the window display . . . he couldn't have less of an appetite, he thinks, kicking a stone against a metal dustbin.

Michael takes a short-cut along a narrow alley beside the Merious nightclub, hearing the clashing of last night's beer bottles emptied into a skip; the aroma of stale lager wafts out the open basement doors, causing his stomach to churn with nausea. At the end of the stone corridor he stops to use a window, inspecting his reflection.

It's time to fix his beard.

So he looks over his shoulder, heart thudding, and takes the beard from a breast pocket in his jacket. He rips protective tape from the glue and attaches the full-facial beard, applying pressure on it around his

mouth and then up along his jaw-line to his ears.

It feels strange having hair encroaching on his mouth – tingly, without being unpleasant. Seventeen-year-old Michael has a compulsion to repeatedly flick out his tongue to touch it. The fine bristles tickle the tip of his tongue, however, so he stops, then uses his fingers to apply pressure on the beard again, to be sure it's stuck fast. He checks his profile in the shop window. The beard adds ten years to him, he thinks. That morning, he'd also combed his hair backwards rather than sideways, using wax for a firmer hold, simply yet drastically altering his appearance.

He is ready . . . *almost ready*, he realises, remembering the sunglasses in the back pocket of his jeans. He retrieves them, bringing them to his eyes, nodding in approval at the disguise reflecting in the window glass.

Michael continues to the end of the alleyway and then leans on a drainpipe, gazing out across the water-drenched street. A car carves through the water on the road, causing waves to break towards where he stands. Michael is unconcerned, however, as he's already wet through, so he darts directly across, heading to the graveled yard under a railway arch

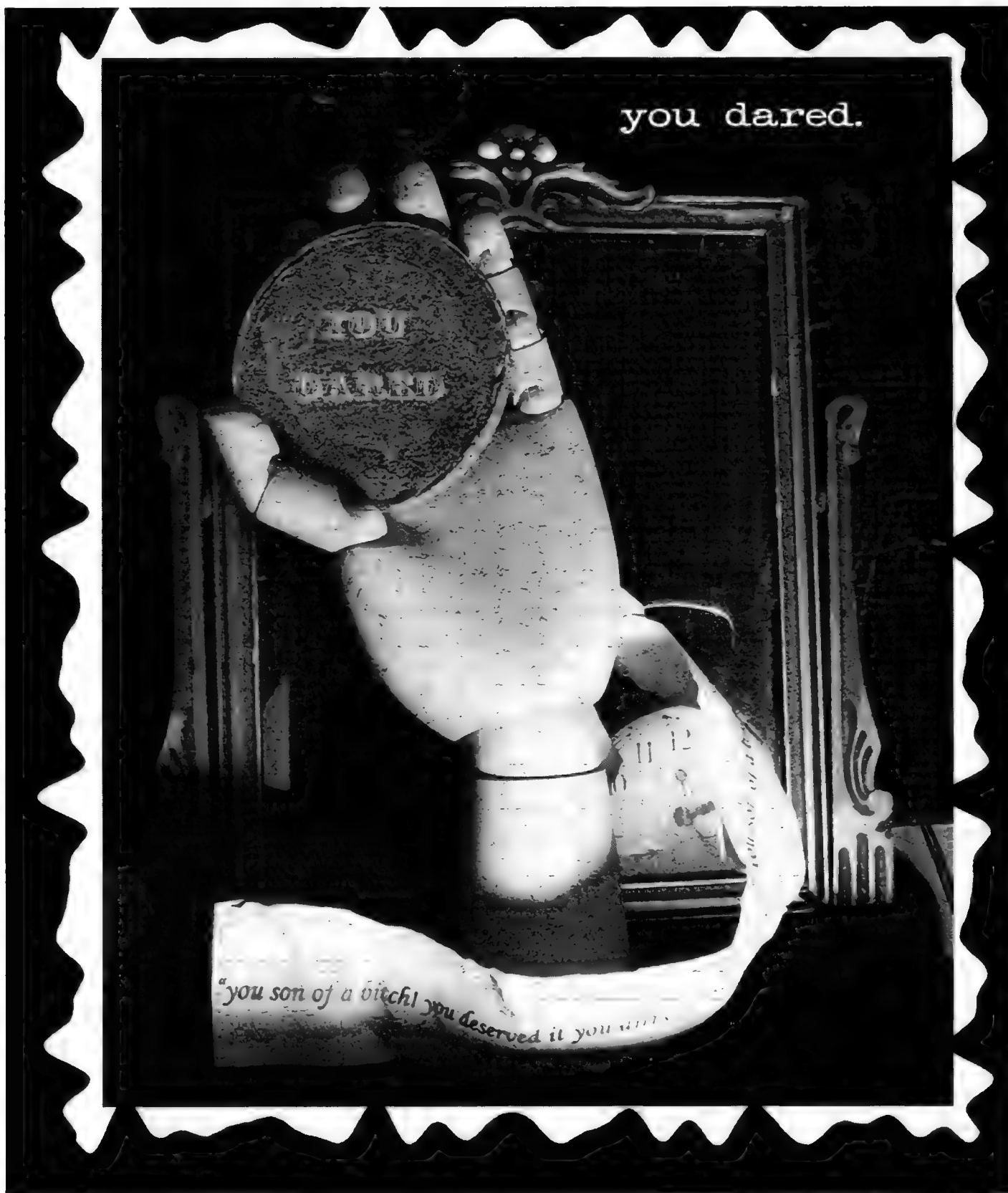


Illustration by Elise Soroka

before veering towards a grotty green door set in a brick wall.

After another quick check that he's not being followed, he glances up at the roofs of the surrounding buildings, and then the railway line, as if fearing a sniper might be lining up a shot at him. But he can see no one, so Michael sends his fingers into his jeans pocket and fights to yank out the large gold coin ... the Gold Token. The mere sight of it increases his heart rate tenfold, sending his legs into a wobbly spasm, and sucking the wind from his lungs. He swallows hard as he examines it; it's the size of an Olympic medal, yet flatter and duller in appearance than the golden Olympic prize, as if trying to shine but somehow always in the wrong light to do so. The coin weighs heavy in his hand. On it are two simple words: *You Dared*.

Michael feels beads of sweat drip down from his armpit hair as he places the coin loosely in his jacket pocket. He looks around again. Nobody's watching, so he reaches for the handle of the door. It's round and silver, smeared by the groping of many similar hands to his. The door opens inwards to a gloomy staircase. He closes it softly behind him and clutches for the stair banister, feeling the hairs on his neck standing on end. His fingertips slip into a sticky patch on the banister as he ascends. He gulps, winces, bringing his hand closer to his face. The wet substance is clear and has a faintly bodily odour. He lowers his hand and wipes the wetness on the grubby stair carpet, before continuing upward, feeling a stiffness in his legs as if he's climbing Everest and not just a damp smelling staircase.

You Dared.

Around a corner at the top, a bright light illuminates the kiosk. Michael approaches as calmly as he can - fighting off waves of sickness as sweat scurries down over his ribs and towards the belt holding his jeans up. Instinct makes him feel for his beard, just in case it's hanging loose. It's not, he realises, sighing as he removes the dark glasses.

The stocky black man in the kiosk eyes him with intent, his round face in dire need of moisturiser, the skin of his cheeks cracking

like flaking paint. He has curly, unruly grey sideburns sprouting below his royal blue flat cap. His jacket is the same blue as his cap, and several sizes too small, the seams stretched to the limit, the buttons struggling not to snap their threads around his bulbous physique.

"I have a Gold Token," Michael says, showing the man his coin.

The kiosk attendant stares at the token, sniffing hard, then leans forward to take a closer look; either the chair he sits in, or his body, creaks its discomfort. The effort of leaning forward seems to have taken its toll on the big black man, for his heavy breaths form a mist on the kiosk glass as he stretches out a chubby hand of calloused fingers.

Michael slots the Gold Token under the glass for the man to see. For a moment, the black guy stares at it sitting there, trying its best to gleam. Then he delicately, with two chubby fingers, lifts it and places it down on his palm, flipping it over again, then raising his eyes and meeting Michael's, a smirk rises up his podgy face. His smirk becomes a positive grin, as he drops the Gold Token into a wooden box that might have been for charitable donations.

He checks his list and then taps his finger on the pad. "Row Q should give you as good a view as any, boy. Enjoy the show," he says, reclining in his chair and closing his eyes. Michael gulps, staring at the fleshy black man who already emits a faint snore, his chest rising and falling.

"Get going!" the kiosk attendant then yells, lurching forward like a striking serpent, one of his eyes open wide, the other remaining shut. "If you don't want to miss the show, you better get a move on, boy!"

Michael jolts back, nodding fast and heading faster along the corridor. He pauses by the maroon door at the end, looking down to his feet, unable to stop his trembling. His hand shakes as he pushes at the door. A large cinema screen confronts him, rows of crimson seats climb behind. The screen reads: *Transmission in 3:55...*

He blinks and the screen reads: *Transmission in 3:54...*

... 3:53 ...

... 3:52 ...

... 3:51 ...

Michael walks towards the back of the room, surprised by the amount of people in the dark theatre. He drops his eyes to the aisle letters, focusing only on finding row Q, but he feels eyes upon him, burning into his mind, wondering what exactly has brought him here today, as he does of those lurking in the shadows. He is glad it's so dark, however, so that nobody but those closest can see him clearly. He finds row Q and only now braves a look up. For a moment, paralysis holds him like he's a stone statue.

"Are you in row Q, too?" the priest asks. Michael blinks, looking from the priest's dark eyes to his hooked nose, and then down to his holy white collar.

Michael nods.

The priest stands and allows him to squeeze by, feeling the priest's hands stroking his back as he passes, sending a rush of goose bumps across his shoulder blades. Michael hurries through and continues to the end of the aisle before sitting, trying to moisten his dry throat.

The screen read: *Transmission in 2:56* ...

... 2:55 ...

... 2:54 ...

Michael breathes deeply but quietly, eyes darting between the numbers counting downwards on the screen and the other people in the cinema. At least a dozen have the same beard as he; half of those also wear the dark glasses he'd only removed just prior to handing over his Gold Token. In fact, as far as he can tell, the priest is the only Gold Token holder who hasn't made an effort to in some way disguise himself, unless his disguise is that of a priest.

A man four rows forward, with a moustache and a checked shirt, bites his nails. An elderly man towards the front, with more wrinkles than hair, has his hands casually locked behind his head, apparently without a care in the world. A fat man in a string vest, whose arms hang like bloated liver-spotted snakes, sits at the end of the aisle ahead, while a

middle-aged man with a ginger beard scans the cinema audience, as Michael is, turning his head this way and that, a hideous grin upon his face, as if he's been sitting for days with a coat hanger stretching his mouth out. He meets Michael's eyes, but Michael breaks eye contact, averting his gaze back towards the screen. *Transmission in* on the screen is written in purple, but the colour is distorted like the seedy letters preceding a low-budget porn movie.

... 1:34 ...

... 1:33 ...

... 1:32 ...

Michael tries to relax, leaning back in his seat after first taking his winter jacket off, flopping it over the chair next to his. He can smell his own tangy, pungent armpits, despite having showered that morning. He gulps as he pictures his parents in his mind's eye, sitting at the breakfast table, finding the envelope he'd left for them by the cereal box. It was a Good Luck card; inside were the bus tickets he'd bought them so they could spend their twentieth wedding anniversary at a luxurious seaside hotel.

But he despises them ...

... 0:45 ...

... 0:44 ...

... 0:43 ...

How can he not? They aren't even his real parents; it's all been a lie – one long, awful deception. But he knows the truth now ... he should have always known that two people so different from him could never be his birth parents. They had presumed him to be sound asleep that fateful night when he snuck down the stairs in the midnight shadows, peering into the illuminated living room where they spoke in whispered tones.

"We made a terrible mistake," he heard his fake mother say.

"I know," said his bogus father, rising from the armchair and going to his wife, placing his hands on her shoulders to massage them. "You wish we could've had our own children, but we couldn't ... so we did what we thought for the best."

"By stealing a baby from its parents."

"It's too late for regrets."

"I've tried to love him as my own," said Michael's counterfeit mother, "but when I look at him, I see only the differences . . . all the reasons why he could never be ours."

"We should never have taken him ...but it's too late now."

"Is it too late?" she had asked.

The prevailing silence spoke volumes. Michael knew that each of his fraudulent parents thought through their options, ways of changing the decision to steal him and then to impersonate his parents all these years. He also guessed that *murder* flashed fleetingly through their thoughts or, at the very least, other means of ridding themselves of him, even now, seventeen years into his life. Seventeen years since he'd apparently been stolen from the cot, taken from his true parents, parents he would now dedicate his life to finding.

... 0:17 ...

... 0:16 ...

... 0:15 ...

Michael awakens from memories with tears in his eyes. His entire life is a lie . . . impostors having assumed the roles of his mother and father. And worse still, the admission that they now wished he'd never been their son. His phony mother's words echo in his skull as he stares at the cinema screen.

I've tried to love him as my own, but when I look at him, I see only the differences . . . all the reasons why he isn't truly ours.

And then his pretend father's words...

We should never have taken him.

... 0:07 ...

... 0:06 ...

... 0:05 ...

The last of the cinema lights dim.

Michael shudders so much that the priest along the row looks to him, perhaps because he feels the vibrations. He appears equally apprehensive, sweat running down from his already moist brow, his holy collar damp. Nobody in the cinema audience understands exactly what they've bought in purchasing Gold Tokens. But it had been so easy, paying the fee and then receiving the tickets and the token. The tickets had been for his parents;

the Gold Token his admission to the cinema today.

Three sharp beeps draw everyone's eyes forward as the screen flickers into life. On that screen, an unshaven bus driver faces the cinema crowd as he fiddles with the camera just above his head, through which Michael and the other eager spectators see the interior of a yellow school bus. The driver looks directly into the lens, grins, winks, and then concentrates again on driving. The camera reveals all the passengers, who aren't school children, but individuals who've had their seats reserved on this special bus.

And each and every one of those passengers sits oblivious to being observed, enjoying the journey, watching out the bus windows as the lush green fields pass them by, and the ocean sparkles under the intense rays of sunshine.

There's a mum with her three ginger-haired kids sitting towards the front of the bus. Two of those children appear to be twins; they're playing a card game while Mother looks fondly out the window, perhaps daydreaming about her husband, who Michael assumes is the ginger-haired man sitting a few rows ahead of him with a big grin spread across his face. Two men sit behind the red-headed lady and her children. One man has a purple, spiky Mohawk haircut, the other man sports cropped hair and a torso-hugging white t-shirt. The man with the Mohawk caresses the other man's hand.

And Michael hears a whimper from the priest wiping his wet eyes. The priest then mutters, "*You bastard . . . you dirty, dirty bastard,*" while his vision is fixed on the cinema screen.

It is towards the back of the bus that Michael sees his pretend parents. He leans forward in his seat, swallowing hard, his throat painfully dry. They sit as if unaware of each other's existence, his fake father gazing out the window, his fraudster mother staring vacantly towards the *28 Passengers Maximum* sticker.

Then it happens.

The driver switches on the microphone to address his passengers, and the watching

cinema audience holds its collective breath.

"Ladies and gentlemen . . . if you'll just bear with me," the bus driver says. "I have a rather unfortunate announcement to make." There is a pause. The bus passengers look forward . . . expectant . . . worried . . .

"Alas," the driver says, "the bus is about to crash."

There is no immediate reaction from either the bus passengers or the theatre audience. But then heads begin to turn on the bus, words of doubt exchanged.

The bus driver then swings the steering wheel with force –

– and passengers scream as they're flung to the floor in a pile-up of tangled limbs. Piercing screams erupt through the speakers of the cinema, as somewhere on the bus a child begins to sob . . .

Then the deafening eruption of tearing metal as one side of the bus caves in, people crushed in their seats as glass shatters and showers in, all to the cacophony of screams and a cry of "*God help us!*"

Michael sees his "parents" among the melee of broken glass and struggling limbs in the bus aisle: people reaching out as if for an invisible saviour, as the bus careens out of control.

Some of the passengers are now gazing in wide-eyed horror towards the front windscreen . . . as if staring directly into the cinema audience, searching for the *loved ones* responsible for buying them bus tickets.

Then an almighty jolt as the bus hits something head-on, hard enough to wrench seats from the floor, passengers airborne as they ricochet off one another, bones cracking as gruesome flourishes of blood decorate the bus's interior.

The screams reach fever-pitch as scarlet becomes the predominant colour, and then more windows shatter with a whoosh of sound; a petrol tank explodes and flames tear through the bus, while plumes of thick smoke smother and choke the passengers that aren't already dead.

The cinema screen turns black as the camera relaying images flickers and dies. But

another camera takes up the job for the benefit of those with a Gold Token. This camera shows the wrecked school bus from the viewpoint of a nearby streetlight. It reveals that the bus has crashed into a huge oak tree and is now engulfed in flame. Black smoke mushrooms above the debris; within, agonised shrieks continue to pollute the air, while blood-spattered limbs dangle through shattered bus windows.

The driver has earned a handsome sum for his family today, but has paid the ultimate price for doing so, now slumped across the dashboard like a drunkard, his skull decimated.

One passenger makes it as far as the steps to leave the bus, but then suddenly freezes as if only now realising he's supposed to be dead. He topples out and lands face-first on the grass, flames ravaging his body. Everything is a fireball as another fuel tank explodes. Distantly, screams can still be heard as a bus tyre bursts.

And then a woman, who's already charcoaled, staggers out of the bus and onto all fours. She crawls a few yards then slumps forwards, the last trestles of her ginger hair singeing.

Then the screen flickers off.

A minute of silence passes in the cinema. Then the priest stands, "*You son of a bitch! You deserved it, you dirty son of a bitch!*"

The majority of the cinema audience remains silent, staring towards the now black screen. But a few begin to clap softly, others shed tears. The first person to depart the cinema is wearing a beard and dark glasses. He stands and makes his way to the exit, another man soon follows. The priest now marches down the aisle, red in the face and sobbing.

Michael then climbs to his feet, his palms clammy and his heart trip-hammering. He stands and waits long after everyone else has departed. Then the curtain closes, and he knows it's time to leave.



Inundated by letters expressing confusion over Ozzy's rating system, Mr Fide now realizes he must dispense with stories detailing his hair-raising exploits trolling the singles scene and instead elucidate the madness and idiocy at the heart of Six Pack Theatre. In other words, why cans and not stars? Why not numbers, or letters, or smiley faces, or any goddamn thing other than beer cans?

Of course, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to come to the realization that a full six pack means that the film under consideration is one that shouldn't be missed. And that anything less, denotes a product of lesser quality. But what's the difference between a four-can flick, say, and a two-can one? And again, why beer and not cans of beans?

Well, for one thing, we're promoting alcoholism. George Bernard Shaw was once inspired to note that if you're moronic enough to believe that Homo sapiens are strong enough to endure life without an anesthetic, then you were simply incapable of understanding why humans drink. Ozzy would add, at this late date, that it's virtually impossible, not to mention impracticable, to watch something as arousing and sublime as, oh say, The Cook, The Thief, The Wife and Her Lover, without quaffing at least six brews.

"Ah, but that's an art-house film," you say. "Why not toast it with a classier libation like Taittinger?"

Because it's our magazine, and we can do whatever we want. But seriously, folks, the reason is, that despite its pretensions, the aforementioned motion picture is, in reality, a

garish piece of exploitation, as Peter Greenway's messterpiece possesses little in the way of story, gleefully celebrates depraved and outlandish behavior, gratuitously interjects violence at every turn, and when finished making with the violence, graces us with steamy, full-frontal sex. Stylishly done, yes. Though to what end? To amaze and titillate as far as Mr. Fide is concerned. Only incidentally, Greenway's protestations to the contrary, to provoke thought or to stimulate debate.

So we ask those who intend to rent the DVD, after reading a review garnering a full six pack, to be prepared to down just about that much while watching the thing. Ozzy has found, after much careful study, that the normal sleaze maven can, in a state of Dionysian frenzy generated by the unspooling of a cracked work of genius, ingest about seventy-two ounces of suds in ninety minutes. A rate higher than this results in derangement of the senses and an almost total incapacitating of the critical faculties. Six brewskis in an hour-and-one-half, the average running time of a genre feature, is just enough to calm the soul whilst concomitantly provoking the id.

Perhaps, at this juncture, Mr. Fide is not making himself crystal clear. What he's trying to say, in his own semi-literate way, is this: a great, nasty, mindless movie will move one to drink, but in a systematic manner. You don't want to miss a minute, yet you want the experience enhanced. Which is next to impossible if you're drunk on your ass. Or merely mildly intoxicated. As most movies are miserable or, at best, tolerable affairs, you're

going to slow down. The desire to consume mass quantities will abate. Your body stops producing adrenalin; the mind begins to wander; and, unless you're a unregenerate boozier, you're not going to feel the need to continue to fuel the machine. If this stasis occurs relatively late in Mr. Fide's screening, a title will be awarded five cans; if paralysis sets in shortly after the title sequence, no cans are bestowed. All of this is calibrated to a ninety-minute gauge. Most movies today, even direct-to-rental horror flicks, run longer. Ozzy is well aware of this. Being the visionary artist that he is, Oz adjusts accordingly.

So, there it is, the Ozzy Fide beer-can rating system. Hopefully, you get it now. If not, write to the folks at Carbon 14 magazine; they've appropriated Ozzy's rating schtick and are pawning it off as their own devise. Or maybe they stole the idea from Film Threat, who at least attempted to hide the thievery by turning the beer cans into cocktails. Still, Oz empathizes. After all, poor thinkers imitate, highly original ones steal. And if you're gonna steal, steal from the best.

I Need A Man aka I Need - (d) Ferd Sebastian (1967)

It looks easy enough: it's the Swingin' Sixties, and you want to make a quick buck with a sexploitation flick. So you pay a few good-looking girls to perambulate in the Go-Go clubs blasting the groovilicious sounds of the day, have them pick up some hairy studs, and then have all their sundry repair to their respective impoverishedly furnished pads to get naked and engage in simulated copulation. Fade to black. End of story. Or, if you aspire to art, have the gals watch the sun come up on the beach after their men have had their way with them and split, and make with the voice-overs from the women in which they bemoan the perfidy of the male sex and the meaninglessness of life in general. Cut and roll credits.

However, if you're a loopy surrealist like Ferd - *Gator Bait*, *Hitchhiker* - Sebastian, you

throw the rulebook out the window. Start with Ceci, a nutty nymphomaniac on the lam from a mental institution, and go from there. Well, actually, as Ceci is nuts and prone to flashbacks and delusions and visions and fits and actions for which there are no names, you can pretty much go anywhere and it will work. Especially if you have a cinematic eye - David Friedman has gone on record stating that Ferd is the best cinematographer in the world - a black sense of humor, and a cynical literary bent. Oh yes, and an imagination so bizarre it would give Federico Fellini pause.

To attempt to tell Ceci's story while unraveling the incredibly complicated plot would take days and, in the end, would prove pointless. And that's the point. Ceci is mad, bad, and dangerous to know. So watch in growing astonishment as Ceci staggers around the city streets in her hospital gown whilst daydreaming about sex with her husband. As no one interrupts these fantasies, Ceci flashes back to an egg cult to which she and her badly-aging hubby Alec once belonged. The cult doesn't do much aside from eating eggs and demanding the female cultists disrobe and affix hard-boiled eggs to their belly buttons, but never mind that, as now we're flashing to Ceci playing guitar in her panties, and Alex excoriating her for permitting the "world to be turned to concrete and plastic."

From here, it's on to the beach with Ceci back inside her head fantasizing over other lovers. There are a lot of lovers, so be prepared to get sunburned. As we hop from man to man, the sound of the waves recede, and the loud, demonstrative voices of Ceci and Alex come to override it. It's unsettling, as Alex's voice is strident, harsh, threatening; Ceci's is coquettish, sibilant, and pitched high to the point of surreality.

Ceci and Alex then come into focus. The dialogue becomes more nonsensical as the anger level rises. Alex slaps Ceci. Cut to the gulls circling overhead. Cut to Alex moving his lips over Ceci's body.

It gets crazier and weirder from here. Ceci ends up in a zoo playing with a baby and wandering around the monkey cages. These

encounters prompt a flash to her miscarriage and subsequent breakup with Alex, as well as thoughts of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Although it may just have been Alex, as he is quite older than Ceci, and in the abuse scenes Ceci is the Ceci we have been watching thus far.

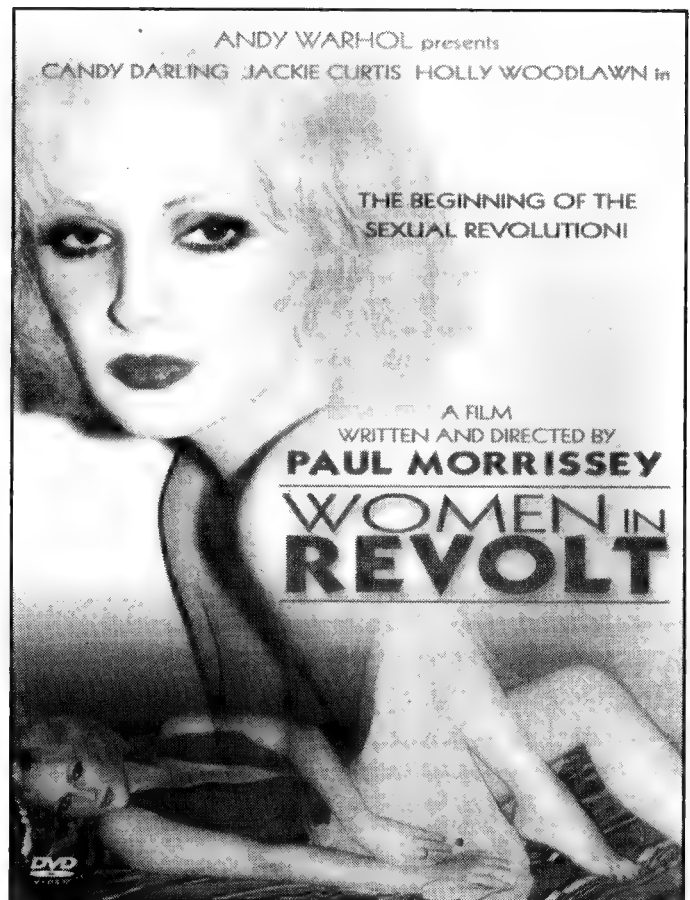
None of this matters. Ceci continues to sleepwalk through the zoo. She begins to talk to the birds, informing them that "I'm in your world now" and that they shouldn't worry as the "trees are made of pumpernickel." One could forgive the patient viewer for taking "flight" at this point - if indeed, he or she has made it this far. Those adventurous souls willing to go along on Ceci's wild ride, however, will be rewarded (although "rewarded" is, perhaps, not the proper word) with a bizarre, mind-bending ride to the edge of nowhere.



Women in Revolt - (d) Paul Morrissey (1971)

Oh my, a white-trash, anti-feminist epic with something to offend nearly everyone! Yes, screenwriter and disdainful director Paul Morrissey disgraces us, for our entertainment displeasure, with the following outrages: sexual assault played for laughs; gays portrayed as campy creeps; men as ineffectual morons; women as libidinous harpies; the rich as superannuated neurasthenics; artists as talentless poseurs. Mostly, though, it's just cross-dressing Warhol superstars Jackie Curtis, Candy Darling, and Holly Woodlawn sitting around bitching about guys and the joys of female liberation. The trio want to change the world and, toward that end, they form P.I.G., short for "Politically Involved Girls." Unfortunately, biology rears her ugly head, so much so that fornicating with each other ultimately fails to satisfy, and our heroines are forced to seek their pleasures elsewhere, politics being left on the back burner.

Jackie discovers men, hooks up with Mr. America, has a kid, and winds up on welfare.



Holly turns to women and then to the bottle - lesbianism will do that to ya. When we last espy her, she's stumbling around the Bowery rummaging through trash cans. Candy, the blonde of the group, screws her way to movie stardom but ends up a basket case.

Is there a point to any of this? Probably, but you'll be laughing too hard to care. Most of the film appears improvised and some scenes do go on too long, but there are about two dozen priceless lines and exchanges, including these:

"Holly's after pussy, and Candy's after cock, but I'm after something more . . . intangible . . . !"

"Take a bath. You smell like a dead papa! Don't you know there's something more beautiful than that thing between your legs?"

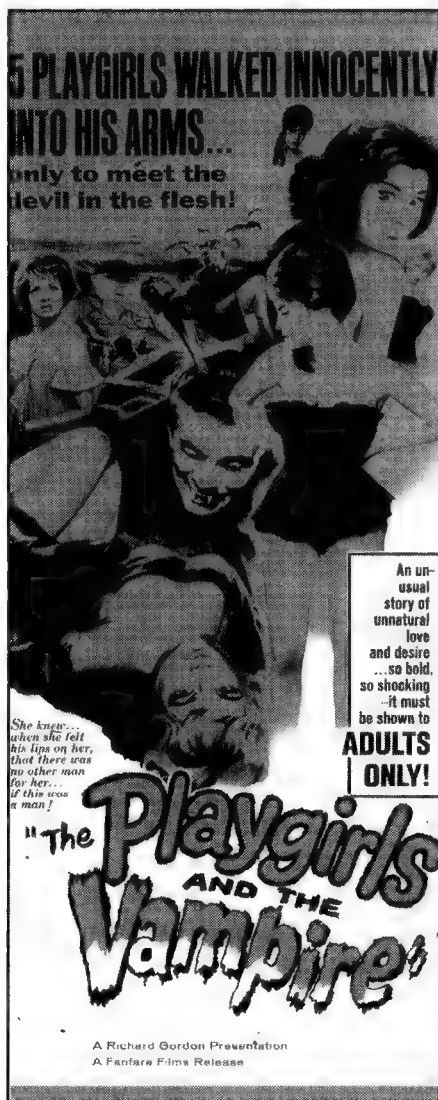
The new edition has been cleaned up markedly from the muddled, washed-out mess it once was and features fifteen minutes of deleted scenes and short comments by Morrissey. For those wondering about the anti-feminist take noted above, here's the director on feminism: "The basic premise of women's

rights - women wanting to be men - I didn't think was a good one." Now, after hearing or reading that, who wouldn't rush to the cinema to see the product of such a provocateur, especially after learning that said product bore the imprimatur of Andy Warhol?



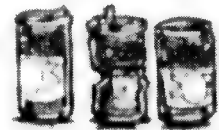
L'Ultima Preda del Vampiro aka The Playgirls and the Vampire - (d) Piero Regnoli (1960)

A sleazy impresario, his five bimchette strippers, and piano player are forced to take refuge in a castle one dark and stormy night after their car breaks down. The castle is run by one Count Kernassy, a suave and soigne son of a gun who bids them welcome but warns all and sundry not to leave their rooms during the night. This is fine with the manager and the pianist, who hit the vino hard and take the subsequent trip to slumberland. The girls, like all ecdysiasts, are repressed lesbians; so left to their own devices, they shake and shimmy for one another, and giggle and strip down to their undies, and make



kissy faces and . . . soon grow bored. Being bad, wicked little girls, they just have to ignore the Count's advice, leave their room, and subsequently explore the castle. Almost immediately, one of their number is assaulted by the Count's vampiric ancestor, who quickly drains his victim's blood, turning her into a ghoulish acolyte. The film then becomes a cat and mouse game, with the undead duo stalking the other women while the Count and his two male guests try to thwart their nefarious plans. The cool twist here is that the Count is the twin of his nasty forebear, so he gets to destroy himself in order to live and make proper human-type creatures with the heroine. It's Freudian and atavistic at once! How cool is that?

Essentially a remake of Regnoli's *The Vampire and the Ballerina* made earlier the same year, *Playgirls* is the far superior and more entertaining film, thanks to the ample doses of nudity and overt eroticism. More voyeuristic exercise than vampire study, Regnoli's enterprise takes every occasion to linger on the luscious and diaphanously clad women while slowly, oh so slowly, zooming in on those parts that drive horror fans and onanists to distraction. Before working in films, the director was a film critic for an ultra-Catholic paper; and watching this, you can understand that, as viewing *Playgirls* is akin to watching the id unleashed with Regnoli giving free reign to all his sexually repressed desires. Not too surprising, then, that the American version had ten minutes of footage deleted before it was allowed to screen in the States.



The Bloody Ape (1997) - (d) Keith Crocker

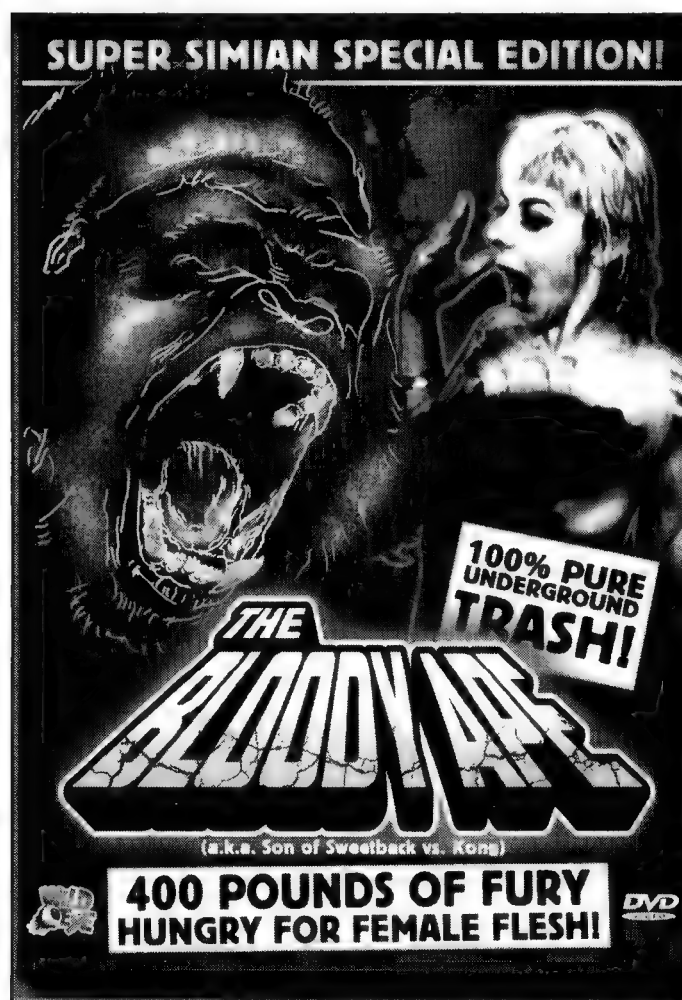
From the deliriously deranged mind of Keith Crocker, founder and publisher of the groundbreaking *Exploitation Journal*, comes this sleazy, deliberately atavistic ode to grindhouse horror films of yore. Loosely, very loosely, based on Edgar Allan Poe's

"Murders In the Rue Morgue," Crocker's maiden effort graces us with one Lampini, an embittered carnival sideshow man letting his star attraction, a four hundred-pound ape, loose on the denizens of a small town in what looks to be southern Long Island. Lampini, who never appears in public without his dimestore cape and top hat, has snapped, you see, because in the same day, his hot blonde mistress has left him, his auto repairman failed to fix his car, and his jeweler has swindled him into purchasing a fake diamond ring. Seeking revenge, the deranged carny devises an ingenious plan involving cutting off the ape's supply of bananas. Wait, that's not all there is. We said Lampini's plan was ingenious, didn't we? Now his ape is crazy for bananas. Why, so crazy that he'd actually kill for them. Maybe so crazy that even the smell of them would make the ape kill. So let's make up with all Lampini's enemies by dropping by and saying, "Hello," and leaving as a gift, a nice, fresh bunch of bananas. For

the ex-girlfriend, why not some soap? Not ordinary soap, mind you, but soap made from bananas! Then we let our hairy friend loose to perambulate about town, ripping people limb from limb and sexually assaulting the women. Lampini's hope is that eventually the ape will murder Lampini's antagonists by being lured into their homes by the smell of the bright yellow fruit. Impossible you say? Well, hell, it's a small town, chances are good that the ape will eventually stumble upon the intended victims.

Shot in 8mm to give the blasted thing an appropriately crappy look, *The Bloody Ape* wears its impoverishments proudly on its threadbare sleeve. Cinematography is from hunger, the lighting lights nothing, the camera wanders as if bored by the proceedings, and more often than not, remains resolutely out of focus, and the soundtrack has more snap, crackle and pop than your average bowl of Rice Krispies. Still, this matters not one wit, not one jot. No, gentle reader, a film with such hateful and moronic dialogue, a film sporting such outrageous stereotyped characters - only the African-American is treated respectfully - knows what it's about. And what it's about is deconstructing the American exploitation film in an attempt to show the viewer just how ridiculous, how absurd, how simplistic the individual elements, the building blocks, if you will, of the genre are. You want sex and violence? OK, how about ape rape? You want disgusting villains? Howzabout morbidly obese, deeply prejudiced imbeciles spouting racist dialogue so moronic it would likely embarrass Rush Limbaugh at a GOP fundraiser. You want comic relief to enliven the proceedings? For our amusement and delectation, we shuffle in a rabbit so exaggerated in manner and dress that the makers of Judd Suss would likely have rejected it as too simplistic a caricature. All of this neatly packaged in a narrative that not only moves linearly from A to B, it consists of nothing more than A to B.

Yes, of course the average viewer, including your hip girlfriend, will be offended by *The Bloody Ape*. But that's the point, Crocker & Company aren't just pushing the boundaries here; they're smashing them to pieces. Not



to shock - everything here is too crude and crudely done for that - but to entertain, and in the process, force the viewer to look inside and ask him or herself why we have so great a need for sex, violence, sick humor, and tawdry entertainment. Why, despite the civilizing influence of breeding and education, these needs remain so resilient, so deeply embedded, so alive within us.

Admit it: you know why, you've always known why, hypocrite reader; monstrous dissembler, vulgar libertine. It is that deep down, way down in your heart of hearts, in the foul rag and boneshop of the soul, you are really not so far removed from . . .

The Bloody Ape!

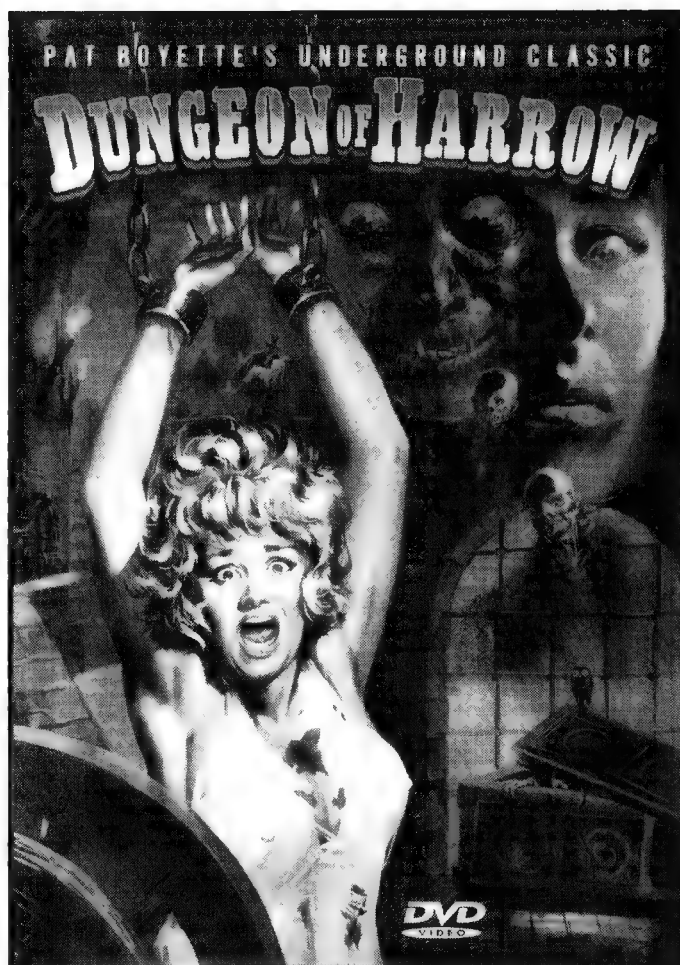


Dungeon Of Harrow (1964) - (d) Pat Boyette

In a tiny, dimly lit chamber permeated with an almost palpable odor of corruption, a wizened old man takes pen in hand to compose his memoirs. "I shall leave a legacy of decay and unspeakable horror," he ominously informs us as lightning flashes behind him through the casement.

Say, "Howdy," to Aaron Fallon, the ostensible protagonist of comic-book artist Pat Boyette's *Dungeon of Harrow*, a film opening in the aforesaid pompous manner which quickly mutates into an eerie and, at times, disturbing absurdist nightmare. Hurling incongruous and inanely mannered dialogue, portentous and florid narration, stilted movement and line readings from its amateur cast, and shoddy special effects at a vertiginous pace, Boyette leaves the unsuspecting viewer breathless and disoriented. It's as if The Theater of Cruelty, desperate for ideas, decided to scour the madhouses for the most seriously ill, and then prevailed upon this select group to collectively write and stage their own performance.

Fallon's story begins with him watching helplessly from his stateroom as the ship on which he is traveling, founders, then sinks off the coast of a small, unchartered island. Somehow managing to survive, Fallon makes



his way to a castle, where he is told by a beautiful young woman named Cassandra that he has stumbled upon the fortress of Count Lorenzi de Sade. All well and good, save for the fact that the Count is completely and hopelessly insane; Fallon recognizes this almost immediately:

"His face bore the sallow pallor of a lifetime of dissipation. His eyes held that familiar paranoid glint of royal inbreeding that left not doubt . . . Yes! My host was quite mad!"

Yet inasmuch as everyone in *Dungeon* speaks in this ridiculously fustian manner, the viewer will also conclude, without a moment's hesitation, that everyone residing in the fortress is also insane. The fun comes in watching the lunatics feigning sanity while trying to murder each other in the most absurd ways imaginable. There are telegraphed and almost balletic attacks with whips and torches, slow torture by cliché and sarcasm, deliberate exposure to leprosy, and battles with real and imagined beings. In the end, only Cassandra and Fallon remain standing, a "startling"

denouement that will “startle” no one. Still, you’re never bored. Your mind cannot wander, cannot sleep when forced to watch inmates run an asylum.

Dungeon of Harrow is a twisted, surreal marvel, a triumph of spirit and vision over technical incompetence and abysmal production values. A kind of Art Brut - crude, naive, pathetic - yet lacking the poetic mystery and profound symbolic undercurrents commonly found in the form. Perhaps, then, Art Brutarian would better serve as a description for this indescribable work.

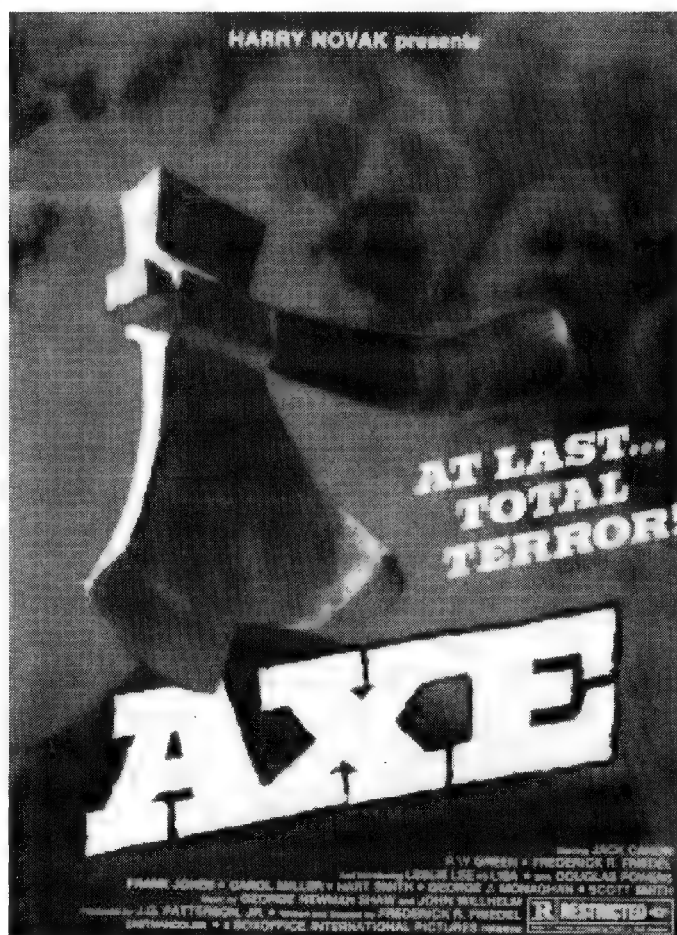


Axe aka Lisa, Lisa (1977) - (d) Frederick Friedel

A fresh corpse is about to be hacked to pieces in a bathtub. As the axe descends, we cut to a brain-damaged old man in a wheelchair, then we jump to a long shot of the dilapidated frame house where the dismemberment is taking place. We linger a few seconds on the house, then cut to a shabby oil portrait of a beaming young girl, before moving to and fro amongst two dirty male intruders as they toss in their sleep. All the while, we are subjected to the dull thud of an axe as it meets cold, rapidly stiffening flesh.

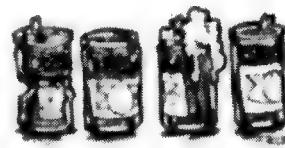
Creepy, eh kids? Well, it’s just one of the shivers you’re likely to get if you’re willing to subject yourself to this low-budget, minimalist shocker, a film crying out for a large screen. For the story of three loutish hoodlums on the lam taking refuge in a remote farm house inhabited by a psychotic adolescent girl, is told largely in cinematic terms. Composition, montage, oblique camera angles, symbolism - all employed at the expense of traditional narrative devices. The upshot, despite the evident budget constraints, is a work which at once disturbs and provokes. The effectiveness of *Axe*, moreover, is not an accident. The sparsity of dialogue, minimalist plotting, simply drawn characters, and abbreviated running time all betray a purposeful design.

Friedel also effectively utilizes the



soundtrack’s synthesized sounds to create and underscore mood: eerie, lugubrious strains presaging scenes of violence, give way to sluggish, somber, distorted passages following the climaxes. Incidental themes, atavistic leitmotifs of a kind, evoke a profound sense of disquiet, even though given voice at the lowest of frequencies.

A horror aficionado coming to the film because of its title - it was also released as *California Axe Massacre* to capitalize on the success of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* - will no doubt expect to be treated to a ghastly slasher exercise. If such a viewer is willing to exercise a bit of patience, he or she will instead experience something far more subtle and interesting: an eerie, forbidding, phantasmagoric dream. A dream all the more frightening, as it appears to take place in a world which, for some inexplicable reason, suggests but doesn’t quite resemble our own.



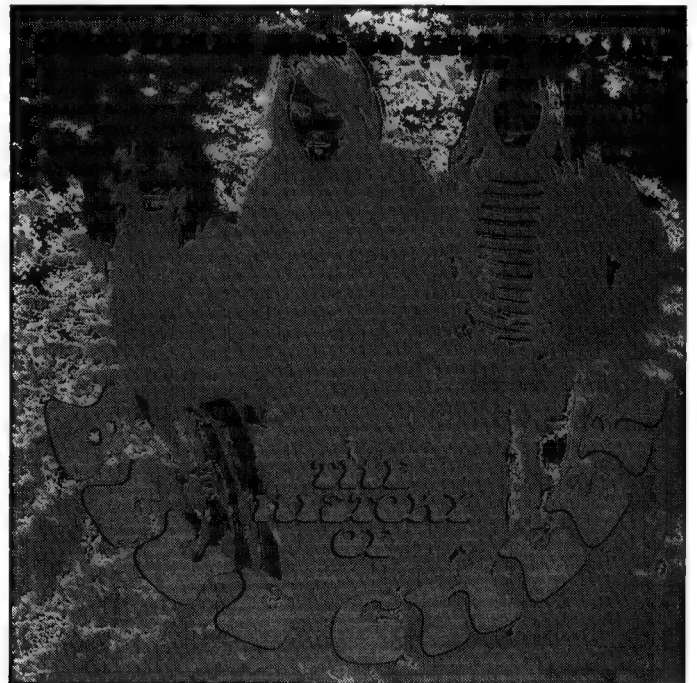
AUDIO DEPRAVATION



what we call in the aesthetic trade, a bunch of visionaries. "Yes," you ask us, "but really, just how 'cool' were they?" Here's how cool: you can play BC's debut, *Vincebus Eruptum*, backwards and it sounds exactly the same as when played forward. It's true, Lester Bangs said so in *Rolling Stone*, so there you are! Also also, their hit version of Edie Cochran's "Summertime Blues" reveals the Who's take on it to be the desanguinated bit of buffoonery we always suspected it to be. And by the time the Stooge's first LP and the MC5's *Kick Out The Jams* were released, *Outsideinside*, the Cheer's second, equally volcanic and eardrum-wracking long player, had ridden the charts

Blue Cheer - History Of (Polygram)

Contrary to popular belief, neither Cream nor Led Zeppelin invented the thunderous, intemperate, heavily amplified sound today known as heavy metal. Blue Cheer did. Led Zep formed well after BC began plying their trade, and Cream, well Cream were too gallant, too decorous, too scholastic, in short, too upper crust in their staid approach to blues-tinged rock. No, it was Blue Cheer, emerging from the San Francisco love-power scene of '67, believe it or not, who were the first to mix lumbering rhythms, distortion, and leaden tempos, and then turn the resulting sludge all the way up past eleven. Add the fact they cared not one jot, not one wit, what you or the critics thought, and you've got,



like a colossus for almost a year. Personal difficulties interfered with the recording of the third magnum opus, *New! Improved!*, but with "Peace of Mind" you got the template for Grand Funk and their working class progeny, and with the mind-bindingly weighty "Fruit and Icebergs" you were gifted with the template for Black Sabbath and their screaming tower of Gothic-flavored metal.

From there, the story gets really interesting, and had we world enough and time, we would tell you all about it; suffice to say, that with their last three releases, *Blue Cheer* ('69), *The Original Human Being* ('70), and *Oh! Pleasant Hope* ('71), the band, now clearly working on a plane more sublime and preternatural than that inhabited by we mere mortals, concluded that the expansion of world consciousness could only be achieved by their becoming ALL things to ALL people. This was an act so magnanimous, so virtuous, so commercially suicidal, it left Cheer's few remaining fans speechless and the critics humbled out of mind.

With the trilogy that closes out the group's career, we get songs which bring to mind the work of other seminal bands of the period, but only in passing. Cheer's goal is to bring you in with the familiar and then let you take flight on the wings of improvisation and experimentation. Thus, "Hello L.A., Bye Bye Birmingham" summons forth the roots rock of The Band as an invocation; "Saturday Freedom's" trippy, Quicksilver Messenger Service-styled blues serves as a point of departure; and while the psychedelics of the mind-altering "I'm The Light" betray the influence of early Pink Floyd, the Cheer here are not content to merely pipe at the Gates of Dawn, their goal is to kick down said gates and break on through to the other side.

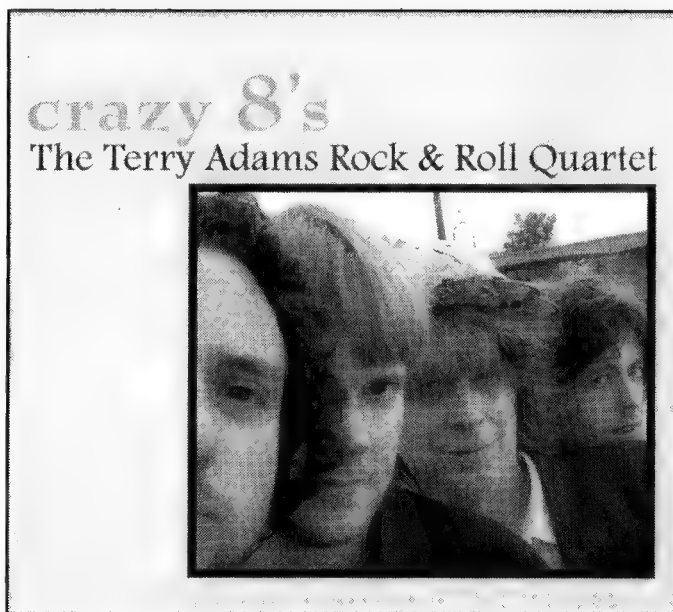
So, as the glorious Summer of Love gave way to madness, murder, and Manson, the times and the music came to demand images and sounds of its accelerated grimace. The red door painted black. Corpses set to banquet...

It was never such for the members of Blue Cheer, whose modus d'art remained fixed on the obscure reveries of the inward gaze, and

whose songs, in the end, celebrated love and idleness as naught else worth the having. (Dom Salemi)

The Terry Adams Rock & Roll Quartet - Crazy 8'S (Clang!)

To me, one of the biggest tragedies in the rock and roll music world over the past several years has been the breakup of arguably the best bar band in the world - NRBQ. (And some might be tempted to remove the word "bar" from the above description.) Co-founders Terry Adams (keyboards) and Joey Spampinato (bass) had played together for close to forty years, with drummer Tommy Ardolino joining in 1974, and Johnny Spampinato (guitar) joining his brother's band in 1994, after Big Al Anderson had put in twenty years. I can't begin to count the number of people I've talked with over the years who didn't know who NRBQ were, yet were familiar with a goodly number of their songs... not surprising, as they put out about seventeen to eighteen studio albums, and another twenty or so live albums, compilations, etc. They quit playing together in 2004, and since that time, have only played a couple of 2007 reunion shows in Massachusetts. There appears to be genuine animosity of some sort between the band members at this point. Hopefully, they will patch up their differences and reunite soon.



In the meantime, however, Terry Adams has continued to write in the 'Q vein, and has gone out and recruited a killer band that, based on the one show I saw last year, as well as their new live album, might as well be called NRBQ II. Scott Ligon, his new guitarist/lead vocalist (and member of a fairly large number of Chicago-based bands and acts), is an amazing musician who combines the best of NRBQ axemen Steve Ferguson (R.I.P.), Big Al Anderson, and Joey S., with his own vibe/chops. Bassist Pete Donnelly is best known for being a long-time member of The Figgs, Graham Parker's backing band on occasion, and drummer Conrad Choucroun, from Austin, TX, has played in a number of local bands there over the years. They're an excellent rhythm section, if not yet in the Joey/Tommy class. Live, these guys are capable of playing anything from NRBQ's huge repertoire of tunes, as well as Terry's recent solo material (mostly from his *Rhythm Spell* (2007) and *Holy Tweet* (2009) CDs). On their recently released live CD, *Crazy 8's*, their only real weakness is Terry doing too many of the lead vocals. In NRBQ, he always had at least two very strong vocalists who handled the lion's share of leads. Terry's voice is a good deal weaker and much raspier than it used to be, but he's still very effective doing harmonies. Scott L., on the other hand, can do the tunes usually sung by Joey S, Big Al, or Johnny S. with equal facility. (Check out his take on old 'Q chestnut, "Get Rhythm," on this new one.) Terry should be concentrating on his strong suits – writing and his incredible skills on the keys – he is, in my opinion, the best rock and roll keyboard player ever, and is every bit as entertaining as Jerry Lee Lewis in his prime or anyone else! If this band is playing anywhere near you, go see them! (John Oliver)

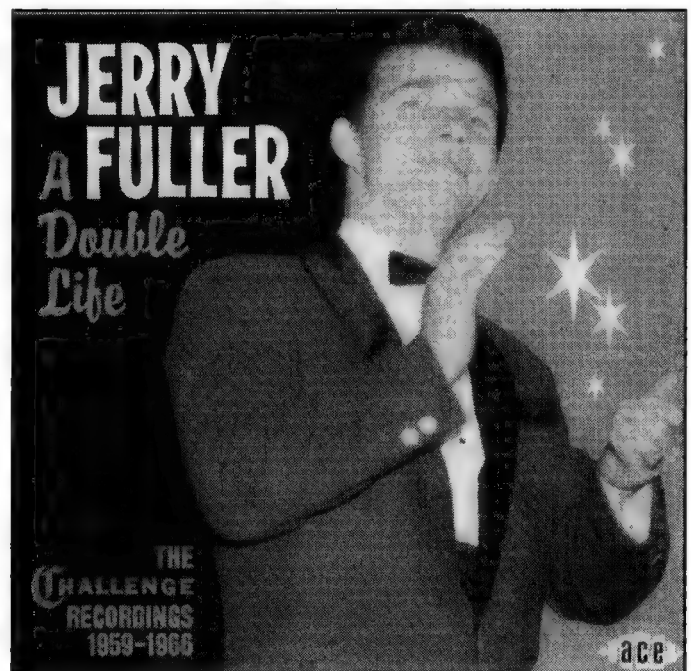
Jerry Fuller - A Double Life: The Challenge Recordings 1959 - 1966 (Ace)

A producer, performer and songwriter - he

wrote Ricky Nelson's mega-hit "Travelin' Man" - Jerry Fuller also discovered talents ranging from Gary Puckett to Collin Raye. This catchy twenty-four-song set covers the Texas native's seven-year stint on Gene Autry's Hollywood-based Challenge label.

A white pop vocalist who smoothly embraced the cathartic properties of r&b and soul, Fuller's stylings are eclectic. Constantly trolling for a hit record, he adapted to whatever sound was hot on contemporary radio, often with memorable results. As a result, he smartly evoked the Northern Soul sound for the single "Double Life" (1966), a funky harmonica-led New Orleans r&b sound for "Anna from Louisiana" (1960), and the adult contemporary heartache of Gene Pitney with "I Only Came to Dance With You" (1963). Further, folk rock a la the Byrds is deftly executed - albeit anti-commie style - with "The Master Plan," and he ably apes PF Sloan on "Man In Black" (both 1965).

Fuller proved remarkably adept at drawing inspiration from other artists, i.e., "The Place Where I Cry" would have fit pop drama kings Ray Peterson or Roy Orbison. "Shy Away," written by Dave Burgess - another Ricky Nelson associate - is driven by a remarkably accurate imitation of teen pop star Bobby Vee. Recording with labelmate Diane Maxwell, he



re-cut Buck Owen's country hit "Above and Beyond" as a bouncy pop number.

Heard today, Fuller was clearly a top talent who could out sing most of his contemporaries, but his inability to click with one style eventually led to an impressive career behind the scenes working with the likes of O.C. Smith, Johnny Mathis, and Reba McIntyre, among others. The music biz is full of stories about great talents who never got their due. This impressive compilation documents the sounds of an especially deserving performer. In the process, it makes a compelling case for Fuller as one of early rock's great unknowns. (Ken Burke)

Lust In Space/America Must Be Destroyed - Gwar (Metal Blade)

Hard to believe it has been twenty-five years since GWAR burst out of Richmond, Va into the glory of semi-obscurity, spraying fake bodily fluids on everyone and everything



as they went. Still, it has been, and now the Scumdogs of the Universe are back with two releases celebrating the fact.

Lust In Space is more about the metal than the funny, but there are still some prize moments of hilarity on display. The dialog between Oderus and Balzac at the end of "Where is Zog?" makes me giggle even on multiple listen throughs, and "Metal Metal Land" is a look at the metal paradise we all dream of where "Everything is Loud/All the Chicks are Strippers/And all their Fathers Proud." The music is hard and fast and catchy as hell.

Age hasn't mellowed these proud outer-space maniacs. Even I cringed a couple of times as Oderus bellowed, "We have no need of your crippled Christ" repeated during "Let Us Slay."

And I am a heathen.

America Must Be Destroyed is perhaps GWAR's finest hour and has been treated as such. Available either as a beautifully remastered single disc or as a special edition packaged with a DVD containing *Phallus in Wonderland* and *Tour DE Scum*. The DVD hasn't been remastered, but hell, you can only polish a turd so much. It is the substance of the turd that matters, and with both on one DVD, that is one packed turd.



As you probably know, *Phallus* is basically the story of the album in which the Morality Squad puts the Cuttlefish of Cthullhu, i.e., Oderus' penis on trial. This Grammy-nominated (tee hee) mini-movie is still as wonderfully offensive as ever. *Tour DE Scum* is a sixty minute concert video that sadly has muffled sound during my favorite GWAR song "Slaughterama."

As for the album, from "Ham on the Bone" to "Pussy Planet," there is hardly a dud on it. "Have You Seen Me," a swinging jazz/metal epic about missing kids, is definitely still officially the most wrong song on the planet.

And yes, we are all still going to Hell for loving it.

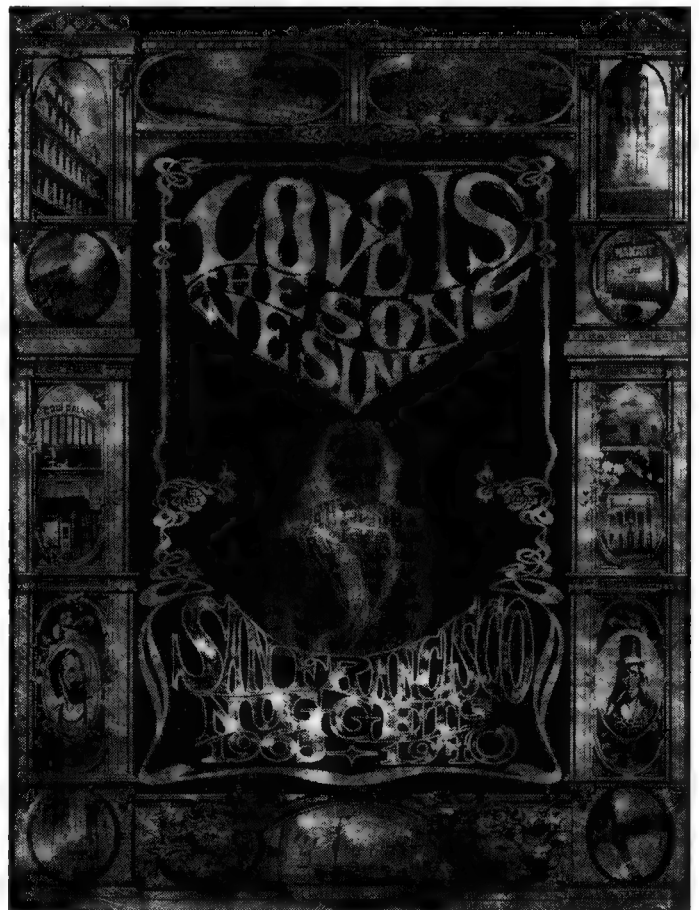
One old and one new, and both are most definitely blue.

So buy both or GWAR may rape your dog. (RR Moore)

Various - Love Is The Song We Sing (Rhino)

In the midst of all the hullabaloo surrounding the fortieth anniversary of the Woodstock Festival, two important facts appear to have been shunted aside. Firstly, many of the performers who touched down on Max Yasgur's farm were rather second rate; and secondly, just as many first rate conglomerates gave second rate performances. So why not spare yourself the sorrow and heartbreak likely to arise after springing for the new and improved CD and DVDs commemorating the Festival, and instead spring for this four disc set, a chronicle of the San Francisco music scene from 1965-70, a far better and more accurate aural picture of the rock and roll spirit pervading the times. Yes, folks, this is where the musical evolution took place: San Frantastic, the locale and state of mind that gave glorious birth to the hippie, psychedelica, free love, the trip, and, for one brief season, the Summer of Love. There was, of course, the music, the revolutionary and often experimental and fabulous sounds of Quicksilver Messenger Service, Jefferson

Airplane, Flamin' Groovies, Blue Cheer, Sly, Janis and her Big Brothers, Moby Grape, Chocolate Watchband, and dozens and dozens of others. Not, no not, the undisciplined jamming that is often unfairly leveled at the heads of the ancient and venerable Grateful Dead, but instead, diversity drawn from confusion delightfully confounded, that is, from jazz and blues and folk and garage rock. The scene and those wigged-out sounds were about not what used to be or once was, but the new and the new, sprung from fevered desire to put something in the air and see if someone breathed it in and, if so, well then, like, crazy man! Madman promoter Bill Graham said it best when he waded in with this, years later; "[It was a] group of blind people with wonderful, warm, honest dreams, and fantasizing. They refused to accept reality, or accept the fact that it existed and then deal with it." Now, I ask you, who amongst us could take issue with such acid-damaged gibberish. OK, Thompson said it better when talking about San Francisco in the middle 60s



being a very special place to be soaking up the zeitgeist:

"There was madness in any direction, at any hour. If not across the Bay, then up the Golden Gate or down 101 to Los Altos or La Honda . . . You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning . . .

And that, I think, was the handle - that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would *simply prevail*. There was no point in fighting - on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave . . ."

This is the music of that time, and that place, and it is timeless and often beautiful in terribly strange ways, and often sublime, too, in ways in which descriptions cannot help but work an injustice. A moment all too brief, before that wave crested and came crashing down with Nixon and tin soldiers and Mansonmyth and Vietnam and Cambodia and Christmas bombings, leaving us, those gentle few, those brave bands of brothers and sisters, on a darkling plain in a nightmare from which we are still trying to awake. (Dom Salemi)

Live From Austin TX - Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys (New West)

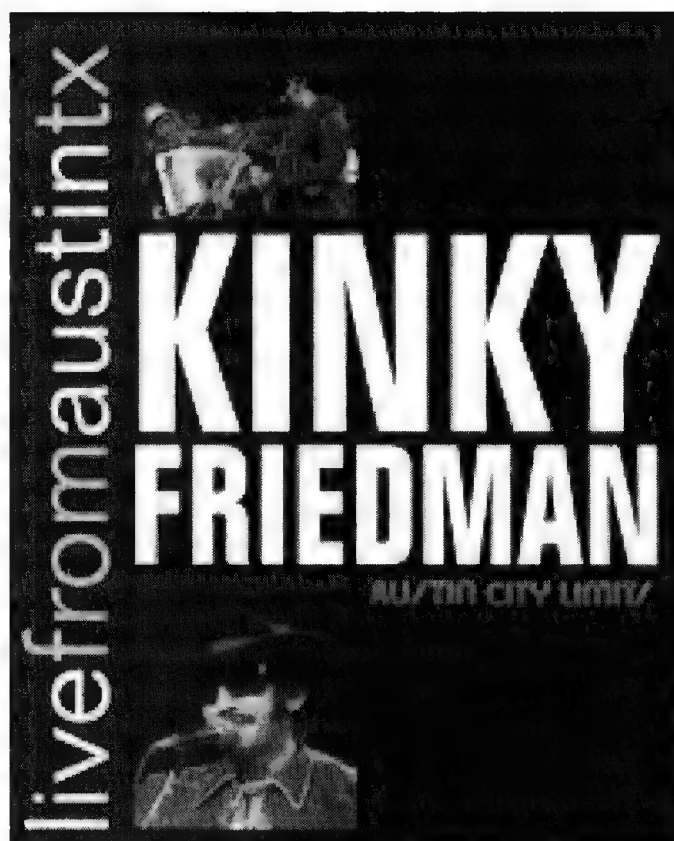
On November 11, 1975, the infamous Kinky and his fabulous Jewboys showed up at *Austin City Limits* to record an episode of the legendary TV show. They were in incredible form, playing to a crowd that mostly loved them. Blazing through a set with almost every jewel from their catalog, it was a helluva show.

It never aired.

In fact, in the history of the show, it is the only show that never showed up anywhere.

Until now.

Released simultaneously on CD and DVD, *Live at Austin TX* captures Kinky and the boys at their best. All the greats are here, with the



exception of the "Ballad of Charles Whitman," although that might have been a rare example of restraint on Kinky's behalf. (Whitman's rampage was at the University of Austin after all.) Even "Men's Room L.A.," Kinky's opus on being stuck paperless in a stall with only a picture of Jesus, makes it, though he does seem to hurry through it a bit nervously.

There is a quite boisterous version of "They Ain't Making Jews Like Jesus Anymore," a song that's sure to make everyone from the racist to the most liberal amongst us a wee bit jumpy. Then again, for a man that started a riot at a feminist college, that's not all that shocking. The sound sadly craps out for a couple of seconds during the Holocaust elegy "Ride 'Em Jewboy," but overall, this is a great document of a band who is just as bizarre and offensive as they were over thirty years ago.

Now frankly, the DVD is the way to go, although personally, I purchased both. Looking like P-Funk if P-Funk were a Jewish country band, the combo almost has to have been seen to be believed. Hell, Little Jewford is dressed like Doug Henning if Doug Henning was Ringmaster at Ringling Bros. Besides,

it is worth the price of the DVD just for the occasional audience member who looks as if they are wondering if they should walk out or just shoot these weird sumbitches where they stand. (RR Moore)

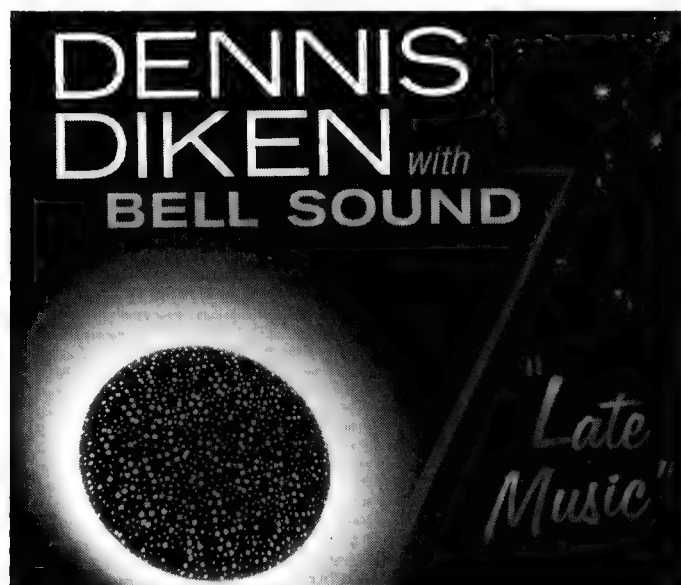
Dennis Diken & Bell Sound – Late Music (Cryptovision)

Smithereens' drummer Dennis Diken, it seems, has been everywhere over the past several years, recording with Nancy Sinatra, Ronnie Spector, Amy Rigby, and, of course, The Smithereens, and playing live with Mary Weiss and others. As fans of his main band are aware, he's a damn good singer in his own right. Based on what I guess might be considered by some his solo debut album, *Late Music*, with old friend, singer/multi-instrumentalist Pete DeBella, Dennis is also an excellent songwriter, arranger, and producer, as well, in addition to clearly being a 60s LA music aficionado of the highest order. Several of the songs here - all written by Diken/DeBella - sound like very high quality outtakes from either an unreleased Brian Wilson ("Standing In That Line," "No One's Listening") or Dennis Wilson ("Fall Into Your Arms") LP. "Long Lonely Ride" sounds like the early Who (of "Bucket-T," "Barbara Ann" vintage) or Beach Boys with Keith Moon on drums, and "I've Been Away" and "Don't Let Me Sleep Too Long" could be long-lost

recordings by The Association, as far as the vocal harmonies. The opening track, "The Sun's Gonna Shine In The Morning," could be a Smithereens' outtake, only with Dennis sitting in for Pat DiNizio on lead vocals. Messrs. Diken and DiBella are aided and abetted throughout by Andy Paley, members of The Wondermints, Dave Amels (The Reigning Sound, Mary Weiss' band), and even The Honeys(!) on one song - no wonder there will be Brian W. comparisons! I understand Dennis and Pete intend to play this material live; it will take a pretty damn large band to nail the lush production on stage. Highly recommended. (John Oliver)

Chet Baker - Chet Baker Sings (Pacific Jazz Records)

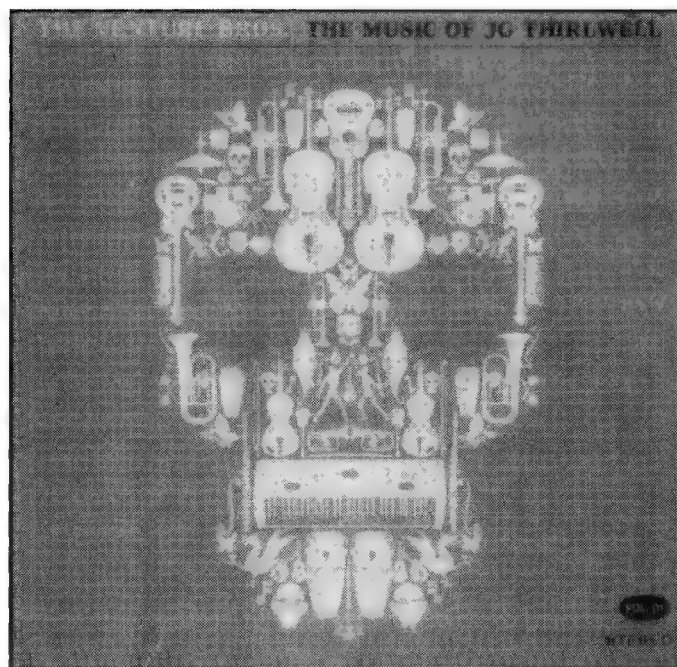
He was the James Dean of jazz, a sublime presence blowing a trumpet in a style that, in time, became the very epitome of West Coast Jazz. That is to say, it was not only cool, but Cool, as in gently swinging arrangements, mellifluous tones, and soft rhythms. Still, this wasn't enough for Chet, oh no. This fabulous Baker boy took up with the vocals at the ripe old age of twenty-four and set the beboppers on their ears. Fragile and bordering on the



precious, Chet's vocalizing eschewed vibrato for a languorous, lilting style, breathtaking in its seeming simplicity. Listen closely, though, and you'll hear a singer holding himself tightly in check, fighting emotions threatening to overpower him. So with a classic like "My Funny Valentine" and its austere arrangement, the sentiments veer from the comic celebratory to something bordering on the funereal. Is love this frightening, this dangerous? Likewise in "The Thrill Is Gone," we're left wondering whether Baker is mourning his inability to feel rather than a romance gone wrong. Baker croons with such icy detachment, such effortless *sangfroid* here, and throughout much of *Sings*, you can't help but feel, by album's end, that you're listening to someone in a state of shock. Or, as a critical wag once said about Brian Ferry - whose unemotional approach to singing clearly betrays the influences of Baker - as if he believes he's the headliner at a cabaret for psychotics. And then there are those sweet, sad soundings of that trumpet of his: the sun softly setting at summer's end. Soft supple susurrations giving us melody as a sigh, allowing us to float gently down into the unconscious depths of ourselves. Until that preternatural and sepulchral voice wakes us and we drown. (Dom Salemi)

The Music of J.G. Thirlwell, Vol. 1: The Venture Bros. (Adult Swim / Williams Street)

As a card-carrying baby boomer - yes, someday they are going to make us all carry cards - this writer genuinely experiences great delight in watching the Cartoon Network/Adult Swim program *The Venture Bros.* A brilliantly conceived take-off on the limited animation adventure genre à la *Clutch Cargo* and *Johnny Quest*, the series poses some rather pointed "what ifs." What happens to a boy adventurer when he reaches manhood? What have all those scary youthful adventures done to his psyche? How well does he follow in his



more gifted and ambitious father's footsteps? What if the former boy adventurer has sons of his own who just happen to be total, well-meaning dolts? The answers to those questions provide some of the finest pop culture satire on television today.

Further, the supporting players are written remarkably well. Gravelly-voiced Dr. Girlfriend sounds like Harvey Firestein, but looks like a curvy version of Jackie Kennedy. Fitfully brilliant arch villain, the Monarch, proves so ineffectual that both his criminal guild and Dr. Venture consider him a mere annoyance at best. Faithful bodyguard extraordinaire Brock Samson - a Race Bannon type - is portrayed as a hair-trigger psychotic whose rage during hand-to-hand combat is never quelled.

The evocative and stirring music of J.G. Thirlwell is the glue that holds this show together. Working from the brassy context of the 1960s, the composer supports the action sequences with a masterful juxtaposition of playful exotica and cacophonous jazz-noir. Meant to work as a send-up, the twenty selections chosen for this CD actually triumph over the music in the 60s/70s cartoons because they express a greater variety of sonic emotion. Played while driving a car, the smartly executed tracks make the world seem like a

perilous adventure is waiting just past the next stop light. And isn't that what life and cartoons are really all about? (Ken Burke)

Re-Animation Festival - Groovie Ghoulies (Lookout)

Taking their name from the Universal Monster mash-up cartoon, Groovie Ghoulies are a late-lamented pop punk band from Sacramento whose twin obsessions with love and monsters show through every hook-filled tune in their too short life.

Fronted by Kepi, whose vocals remind you of Gordon (Violent Femmes) Gano's less creepy younger brother, the Ghoulies released just nine full length albums and a handful of EPs before creeping back into the night, perhaps as a warning that one should never start a band with one's spouse.

Re-Animation Festival is their fourth album, and a great starting point for new listeners. Starting out with "Tunnel of Love," a story of romance at the Haunted Mansion and ending with a killer cover of Wilson Pickett's "If You Need Me," there is not a clunker in the bunch. Highlights include "Graceland," a Fifties-infused rocker about re-animating Elvis' corpse, and "Evading the Greys," a droning tale of alien abduction.



The Ghoulies do have a bit of a Ramones fetish. In fact, Kepi even pronounces "yeah" just like Joey. Still, there is more to them than that. This is a band that sings to the monster kid in us all. And dared to do it with pop-ish hooks that defy the Misfits or Meteors-obsessed norm in horror punk.

So raise your glass of fake blood to these fallen brothers and sisters, and do yourself a favor and pick this (or any other GG CD) up and throw it in the CD player.

You'll thank me for it. (R.R. Moore)

Ian Hunter – Man Overboard (New West Records)

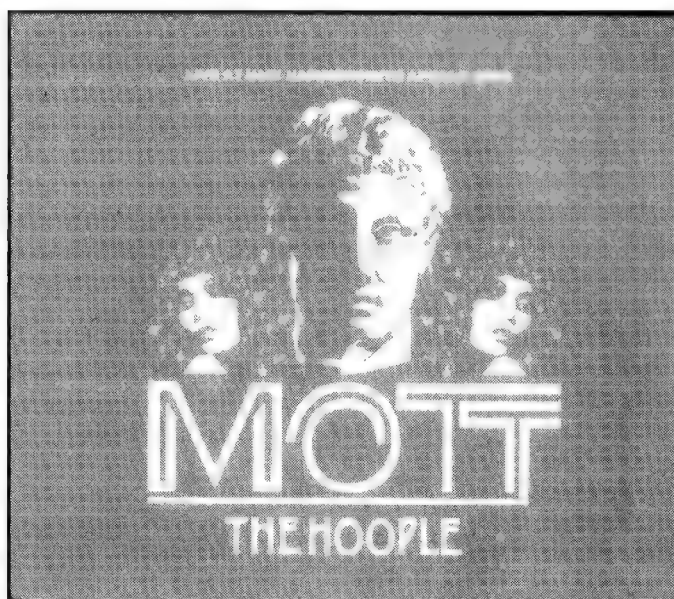
Mott The Hoople – 10/1/09 Reunion Show (Concert Live Import)

Ian Hunter, who recently turned seventy, has just released two excellent albums: his most recent solo effort, *Man Overboard*, which may be his best since (take your pick) his self-titled debut solo record, with Mick Ronson in 1975, or *You're Never Alone With A Schizophrenic*, from 1979; and a live Mott The Hoople reunion show, the first of five shows at the Hammersmith Apollo in London last month (October 2009), captured for posterity by the Concert Live people. On *Man Overboard*, Hunter uses the same band he plays with live, who also recorded 2007's *Shrunkn Heads*



with him, yet another top-shelf effort. On *Man Overboard*, Ian turns down the tempo a bit, but picks up the intensity, with a slew of very melodic ballads and mid-tempo rockers, with lyrics which tell great stories. Highlights include "Girl From The Office," a potential hit if ever I heard one, and the gorgeous closer, "River Of Tears." To me, the older Hunter gets, the more and more he seems to be turning into a UK version of Bob Dylan - who's also putting out great work the older he gets - ironic, since my first exposure to Ian was on Mott The Hoople's debut album from 1969, which, at the time, was either praised or knocked for coming off as Bob Dylan meets the Stones.

Mott The Hoople was a killer, straight-forward, hard rock band, albeit with the Dylanesque folky qualities thrown in, through their first four albums, none of which sold all that well, and none of which broke the band here in the US, although there were those of us who loved the group with a passion. They were and are, of course, much better known as a glitter/glam band after being resurrected by David Bowie (who talked them out of throwing in the towel) via their monster 1972 hit single "All The Young Dudes," which made them huge in the UK (although it barely broke the Top 40 over here), as well as the album of the same name. Their sixth and best album in 1973, *Mott*, was their first Top 10 LP at home, and it enabled them to headline shows in the US. They were always an excellent live band. Additionally, they're still a greatly beloved band in England, as evidenced by the quickly sold-out shows when they decided to reunite while they're all still breathing. Based on this one live memento of their first Hammersmith show on October 1, it's easy to see why. There's still a strong chemistry among these old geezers, even if the show was a bit rough in places, and surprisingly, many of the live versions of their old songs here surpass the originals, even after limited rehearsals. (Examples: their live take on the Velvets' "Sweet Jane," "Moon Upstairs," and especially some of the ballads.) Messrs. Hunter and Ralphs, who have stayed active in music over the years, of course, do much of the heavy



lifting here (although Mick's voice appears to be shot), especially Ian's impassioned vocals – he's clearly a better singer now, even if it does sound like he's gargled repeatedly with razor blades over the ensuing decades. My only disappointment: not enough tunes from albums one through four. But then again, these guys know what their fans most likely wanted to hear: albums five through seven. An astonishing, very moving live show from a bunch of old men, whom we never thought we'd see reunite . . . but I'm certainly glad they did. (John Oliver)

The Shirelles

Baby It's You / The Shirelles and King Curtis Give a Twist Party Foolish Little Girl / It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (Ace)

OK, let's just say it out loud once: the Shirelles were the best of their genre, and Ace Records in England has shown remarkable foresight in reissuing these wonderfully remastered, authoritatively annotated two LPs on one CD sets.

Baby It's You - the quartet's third album - runs the gamut from romantic reverie ("Soldier Boy") and heartache ("Baby It's You"), to sax-led dance tunes ("Twistin' USA," which sounds like a remake of Chuck Berry's "Back in the USA"). Sporting very little filler, the outing



featured string-laden adult contemporary ("The Same Old Story"), spirited teen r&b ("Big John," "Irresistible You"), and hook-laden cautionary pop ("Voice of Experience," "Twenty One").

Sax-man supreme King Curtis lays down solid jukebox instrumentals ("Take the Last Train Home," "New Orleans," "Potato Chips") on *The Shirelles and King Curtis Give a Twist Party*. Further, he takes acceptable shots as a vocalist, covering a Ray Charles classic ("I Got A Woman") and dueting with the group ("I Still Want You"). Yet, the Shirelles reign supreme on follow-ups to their earlier hits "Mama Said" ("Mama, Here Comes the Bride") and "Soldier Boy" ("Welcome Back, Baby"). The addition of three bonus tracks, including a single backing the mysterious Valli ("Hurry Home to Me Soldier Boy"), make this a worthwhile collectible.

Foolish Little Girl might just be the last great Shirelles album. Besides the hit teen title tune and the Top 30 charter "Don't Say Goodnight and Mean Goodbye," are solid servings of sassy r&b ("Hard Times") and uptempo pop ("Not For All the Money in the World"). Also included are a classic cool-your-jets-lover ditty ("I Don't Think So"), a tough twist variation ("The Twitch"), and some lovely soft pop ("Only Time Will Tell").

Minor hits and misses dominate *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. The title track for the film of the same name (which substituted a cohesive script and focused direction for an all second-banana cast), was too light for the group, and it bombed. Gospel inflection seems to fuel the best uptempo pop rockers ("Everybody's Goin' Mad," "You Satisfy My Soul"). The Beatles and several other groups picked up on the LP's one true classic ("Boys"). Yet, too often the group is steered toward unconvincing novelties ("31 Flavors," "The Music Goes Round and Round") and covers ("Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Da").

Although they continued to make good, sometimes great, music, the Shirelles had clearly played out their commercial string by 1964. That said, their music still sounds fresh, youthful, and heartfelt. Very few groups exhibit the sort of chemistry that spans the decades, but that sonic magic can be found here. (Ken Burke)

Various - 2131 South Michigan Avenue: 60's Garage & Psychedelia from U.S.A. and Destination Records (Sundazed)

So much time and ink has been spent chronicling the New York, San Fran, and



greater midwest garage rock scenes that the City of The Big Shoulders has been virtually ignored. Well, there was a thriving thing going down in Chi-Town, and no label give greater play to white boy-60s-British-Invasion wannabes than U.S.A and its spinoff Destination Records. We start with tiny U.S.A Records setting up shop in 1966 right across the street from the legendary Chess Records in order to steal, ahem, soak up the vibe. Early output, natch, was geared to the r&b market, but when fledgling producer Jim Golden signed on the same year, the label really took off. Golden understood AM Top 40 like no one else, and using his pull with the DJs at 50,000 watt WLS in Chicago, he was able to get consistent play and natural saturation for his product. In short order, you had kids all across the country - and some foreign climes we're told - clamoring for the likes of The Ricochettes, The Boyz, and The Shady Daze. Paul Glass, the founder and owner of U.S.A., was so grateful for Golden's tireless work, he let the latter spin off his own Destination label. 1966 through 67 were the peak years for both labels, with hits from the likes of The Flock ("Take Me Back"), The Cryan' Shames ("Sugar and Spice"), and The Buckingham's chart topper "Kind of a Drag." The whole enterprise came crashing down in 1968 when Golden left/merged to start what

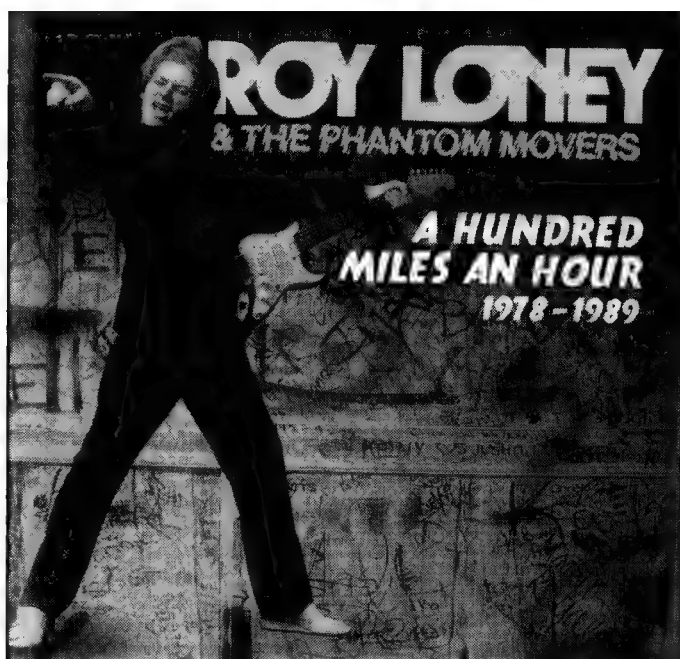
eventually became Wooden Nickel.

Naturally, the good folks at Sundazed, the people responsible for slapping together this fab two disc set, couldn't get the rights to "Kind of a Drag." The hell with that noise; we'll take The Buckingham's far more manly take of "I'm A Man" any day of the week. Same with The Cryan' Shames, if we can't hear their big regional hit, we'll be happy to settle for their cry tough outing "Ben Franklin's Almanac." And we hadn't no clue as to who or what were Oscar Hamod & The Majestics before setting down with this comp, but five cuts from this phenomenal and savage quartet just ain't enough. Sundazed or someone has to run down the rest of this combo's raw, muscular oeuvre.

In the interests of full disclosure, the potential purchaser must remember that producer/label owner Jim Golden was primarily interested in fashioning hits, that is to say, exploiting the popular sounds of AM Top 40 radio. So those coming to this expecting a *Nuggets* or a *Back From The Grave* are likely to be disappointed, as *2131 South Michigan Avenue's* feet are firmly planted in a hoi polloi garden. And there's little in they way of true psychedelia, save for a few tracks like "The Trip" by Park Avenue Playground, and "What Would You Do If The Sun Died" by The Flock. Again, most of these offerings were recorded well before Woodstock and the Summer of Love. Nevertheless, most of what's here is choice, and it's all beautifully packaged, and includes a fold-out insert containing dozens of vintage photos, an interview with Golden himself, and extensive liner notes. (Dom Salemi)

Roy Loney – A Hundred Miles An Hour 1978-1989 (Raven Import)
Roy Loney and Senor No – Got Me A Hot One! (Bloody Hotsak Import)

In the last issue of Brut, I yammered on about what a great decade the 00s have been for us Flamin' Groovies fans . . . and dammit, it's

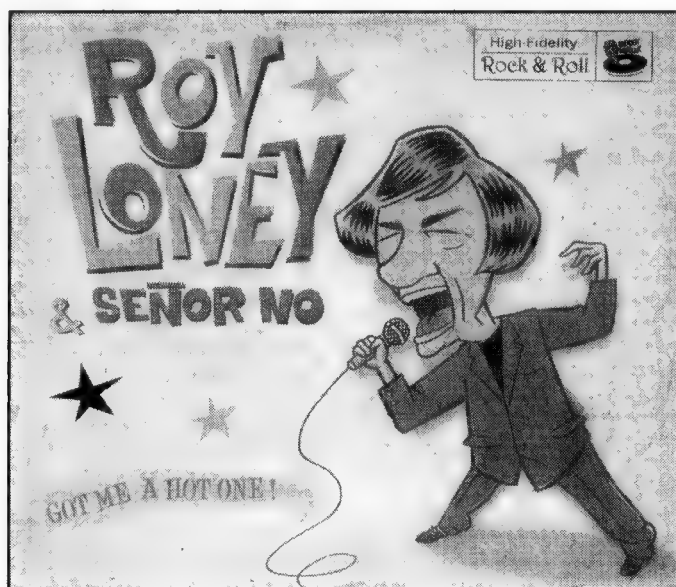


gotten even better! Roy Loney and Cyril Jordan reunited to play the 2009 *Ponderosa Stomp*, accompanied by The A-Bones, in late April, and then played NYC twice (actually Hoboken (Maxwells) and Brooklyn (Southpaw)) in July. Great, high energy shows, and obviously those two still share one hell of a lot of musical chemistry on stage. No surprise, as Roy has always been a killer live entertainer. He had also returned to the studio with a vengeance in 2004, with his excellent *Drunkard In The Think Tank* (Career Records), followed by the even-better *Shake It Or Leave It!* in 2007 (also on Career). Then, this year (2009), two additional CDs have come out from Mr. Loney: the first, a retrospective of his earlier material with The Phantom Movers; the second, a selection of mostly unavailable cuts from his solo career, combined with a brand new smoking set of tunes he laid down in Spain with a young local band called Senor No.

For those who aren't familiar with Roy's earlier post-Groovies recordings - and shame on you if you aren't! - the Raven single disk comp is about as good an intro as you'll ever get, with goodies from his debut EP and LPs on Solid Smoke, War Bride, and the Lolita label, as well as three tunes from his '89 LP, *Scientific Bombs Away*, which actually is (or was) available on CD. Practically all of his solo debut, *Artistic As Hell* EP, and '79 full-

length release, *Out After Dark*, are included here, as it should be. Had the Groovies of *Teenage Head* vintage continued along their path, instead of Roy leaving the band, *Out After Dark* is probably the closest thing out there to what they might have sounded like - and I love *Shake Some Action* equally, but it's a different band and sound. All of Roy's other studio records are represented here, with the notable exception of *Contents Under Pressure* from 1981, which I know is not one of Roy's favorites. All in all, a great, great compilation of ass-kicking roots rock and roll. Yeah, they could have included his great cover of "Rockin In The Graveyard," or maybe the title track to *Contents*, but dammit, there are twenty-eight songs and seventy-seven minutes on one disk here!

Roy's brand new CD *Got Me A Hot One!* caught me totally unawares. I knew nothing about this release until talking with Roy at Maxwells this past July 23, prior to his show with Cyril and The A-Bones there. He had a stack of CDs and 45s with him for the merch table. I saw the new one, and asked him about it: "It's something I cut in Spain with a band there, Senor No . . ." [Note: my word processor can't put the squiggle over the n in Senor.] I immediately bought a copy and played it later that night in my drive back to the NJ hotel I have been staying at, still buzzed from the great Roy/Cyril/Bones live show. My God! This

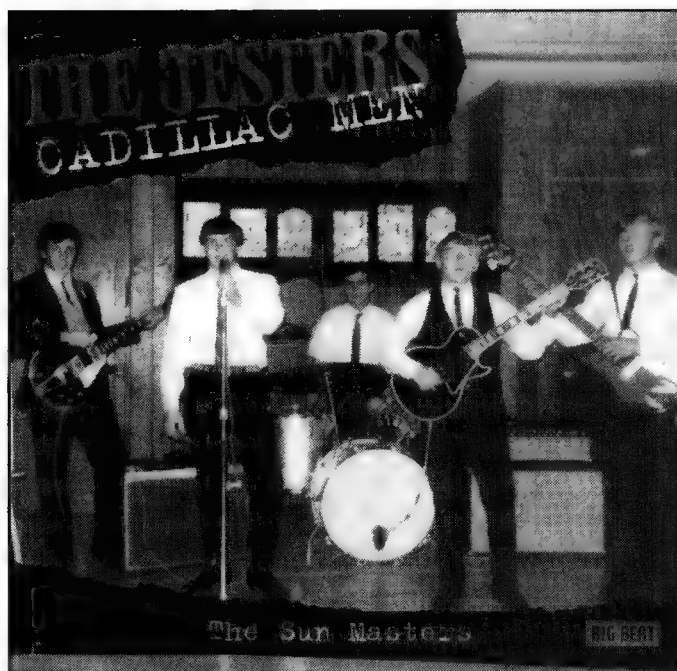


CD smokes! An excellent, straightforward, good old fashioned rock and roll album, with a great band who obviously appreciated their chance to record with Mr. Loney . . . and were up to the task! Rockabilly lunacy (title track), the usual tasteful and tasty covers (The Strangeloves' "Cara-Lin," The Kinks' "Act Nice and Gentle," The Mojo Mens' "Dance With Me"), re-recordings of two of Roy's artistic-as-hell tunes ("Love Is A Spider" and "Least Magnificent Moment"), and a Flamin' Groovies' chestnut ("Headin' For The Texas Border," this time sung by Roy and not Tim Lynch), as well as some great new originals, notably a new power pop classic ("(Don't You Think) My Heart Has Had Enough"). Yet another mandatory purchase for fans of the Groovies, Roy, and roots rock and roll at its finest. He's still alive, kicking, and putting out great music! (John Oliver)

The Jesters - Cadillac Men: The Sun Masters (Ace)

During the final days of Sun Records under Sam Phillips, a Memphis-based rock band called the Jesters recorded quite prolifically, although only the faux r&b "Cadillac Man" saw release. The best of their Sun sides and stints as the Escapades are encapsulated on this eighteen-song delight. No, high-schoolers Teddy Paige, Eddie Robertson, Bill Wulfers, chief songwriter Tommy Minga and Phillips's son, Jerry, did not possess the same culturally transcendent abilities as Sun discoveries Elvis, Jerry Lee, Carl Perkins, Billy Lee Riley, et al. That said, their zany antics and off-kilter r&b-fed garage rock ("Cadillac Man"), mixed with a tinge of British blues rock ("Strange As It Seems"), made for some genuinely diverting sonic experiences.

Struggling to find their way, the Jesters covered some classic 50s ditties ("Boppin' the Blues," "My Babe," "Heartbreak Hotel") that feel awfully thin and colorless today. However, at their best, they were primitives with a smart sense of showmanship ("What's the Matter Baby") and puckish feel for the dance-



floor ("Stompity Stomp"). At a time when the Rolling Stones were making harmonica-laced blues popular, the Jesters showed themselves masters of urban put-downs ("Get Gone Baby") and punk heartache ("The Big Hurt").

Equally interesting are the Escapades sides, featuring, Minga, and a very snappy mid-60s rock aggregation sounding like a cross between Question Mark ("I Tell No Lies") and the Zombies ("She's the Kind"). Solid period music that sounds fresher today than it probably did in 1965, it's complemented by Alex Palao's detailed notes and entertaining interviews with band members. (Ace has few peers in this area.) Frankly, it doesn't sound like something that came from Sun Records in Memphis, and rockabillics will likely disavow it, but fans of mid-60s rock will deem this one hell of a find. (Ken Burke)

Live & Undead - Unknown Hinson (Uniphone)

Finally gave up on the notion of free radio and sprung for that XM-Sirius deal. One of the many remarkable stops discovered was Outlaw Country, number twelve on the dial, a station headed-up by Mojo Nixon, and dedicated to the music of anti-Nashville types. While I don't have many complaints about the



Words should be added here that clever lyrics would mean doodly squat without Unknown's almost supernatural ability to mess with conventional southern musical tropes and turn them into something fresh and entertaining. There's also the amazing guitar work, a mix of Hendrix and Atkins and Duane Eddy; it burns, it cuts; it slashes; it shocks and amazes; it's soooooo generous.

Live & Undead largely consists of Unknown's current tour set, and is thus an ostensible cherry-picking of the Great One's first three discs, nevertheless, one would be remiss in not purchasing everything he's done. It'd be a crime, too, if you didn't call ole Mojo at *Outlaw Country* and demand they put this stuff into permanent rotation.

Magic Christian – Evolver (Dirty Water)

While I reviewed this latest CD from the San Francisco-based power-pop supergroup Magic Christian in the last issue of *Brut*, it's since been re-released with four additional cuts on Dirty Water Records, and the additional tunes and a possible re-mastering(?) have improved this album considerably. It was already one of my favorite releases of 2008, just as the band is one of my favorite live acts. As I pointed out last issue, the new rhythm

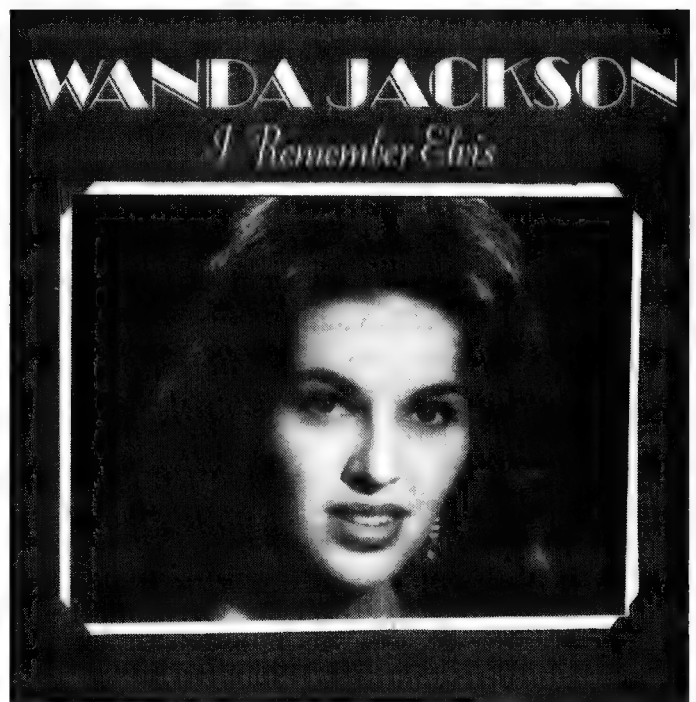


programming - how can you bitch about an outfit that gives wrestling mediocrity Hillbilly Jim a three-hour weekend show - I continue to be mystified as to why Unknown Hinson doesn't get some spins. I mean, who the hell is more "outlaw" than Mr. Hinson, a country western and rockabilly player who dresses as a Porter Wagoner-vampire? Not only that, Unknown has fangs on the lower, not upper, set of teeth! And even more so than Waylon, Paycheck, and Hank III, et al., this hillbilly puts the "out" in "outlaw." Where most country types would be singing about drowning in their beer over some woman, Unknown downs about thirty-five brews and then goes on over and breaks into his beloved's house ("Foggy Windows"), or just calls some married woman he's taken a fancy to and announces he's coming right over, whether she or her spouse likes it or not ("I Ain't Afraid of Your Husband"). Not that our *soi disant* troubadour - that's French for original like - can't be romantic when it's appropriate. I mean, one would have to have a heart of stone not to be moved by the tender sentiments expressed in such chart toppers as "I Cleaned Out A Room (In My Trailer For You)," or "I Make Faces (When I Make Love)." Few Music City regulars, I bet, would even dare to lay themselves as bare as Hinson does when professing his undying loyalty to his love doll on "Polly Urethane." That takes real guts.

section of Eddie Munoz (bass) and Clem Burke (drums) has really transformed the live sound of these guys, pushing them into a higher stratosphere, and the band's decision last year to go out and tour also greatly improved them. While they took a break from touring earlier this year to allow Cyril Jordan to play three shows with Roy Loney and The A-Bones, a dream-come-true for Flamin' Groovies fans, I recently saw them again in early September in San Francisco, and it was their best show I've ever seen! Around that same time, Dirty Water Records re-released their second CD *Evolver* as mentioned above, complete with four new tunes recorded late last year. The new CD sounds better, and one of the new tunes, "Gamblin' Man," is right up there with damn near anything Cyril's ever written or recorded! Starting with its backwards "Let's Spend The Night Together" opening riff, it's the kind of catchy, hooky song the Stones used to be able to conjure up thirty-five years ago. Mick, Keef and the boys haven't put out anything like this slice of rock and roll mayhem in ages. After hearing this, MC singer Paul Kopf's "Who The Fuck Is Mick Jagger?" t-shirt he occasionally wears in concert makes sense! The other new tunes include a faithful cover of The Who's "It's Not True," a perfect vehicle for Clem Burke's channeling the young Keith Moon. As I mentioned in last issue's review, hopefully, CDs like this will get these guys enough exposure to play bigger venues and get bigger bucks. In the meantime, they'll settle for opening for newer bands like Tinted Windows (at the aforementioned SF show in September), and mop the floor up with them as far as live performances. Highly recommended . . . Oh, and Cyril – I know Paul's a great singer, but you guys sound better sometimes swapping off on lead vocals ("Run and Hide," "Something On My Mind," etc.). Howsabout doing some of this live? (John Oliver)

Wanda Jackson - I Remember Elvis (Golden Land Records)

Let's forget the fact that Wanda Jackson



is still alive after years and years of hard-living and fairly constant touring, and focus on the fact that on this Elvis' tribute CD, the little woman shows she can still flat out git it. That other Elvis thinks so, too. Costello,

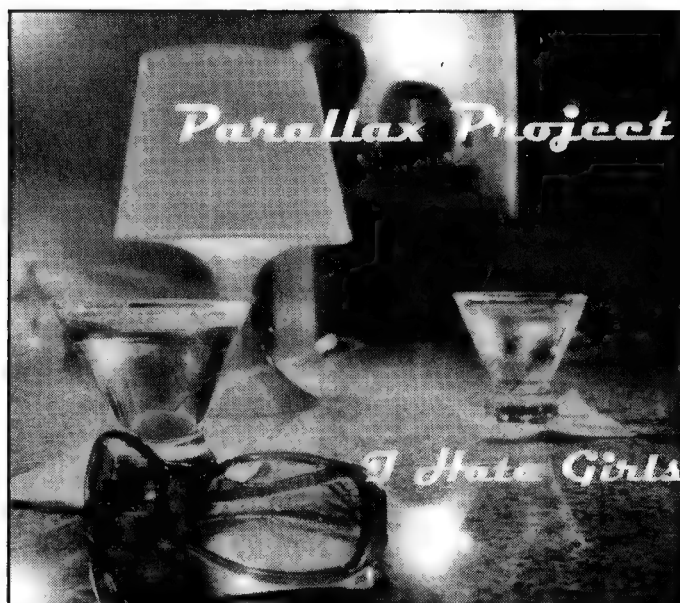


he wrote the liner notes here. And whattya mean you don't remember Wanda? Sure you do: girlfriend to the King in the mid-50s; "Fujiyama Mama," "Hot Dog That Made Him Mad," "Let's Have a Party"; the one who put some sizzle in country music, the genre in which she started, with the tight fringe dresses, high heels, and uninhibited singing stylings. Hell, let's not put too fine a point on it, Janis Martin adherents to the contrary, Wanda was the first great female rock and roll singer.

It was at Presley's urging that Wanda turned to rock, and so on *I Remember Elvis*, Jackson returns the favor with thirteen interpretations of The King's Sun and early RCA sides. Done rockabilly style with that nice Sun echo effectively reproduced, anchored by Blondie's Clem Burke on drums, and dressed out with some appropriately languid and twangy guitar work courtesy of Danny B. Harvey (more Carl Perkins than Scotty Moore). Jackson's voice has weathered some, and she leans more toward the country side of things, but that's all to the good; it makes such chestnuts as "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," and "You're Right, I'm Left, He's Gone," feel lived rather than visited. And when Wanda lets herself go on rockers like "Good Rockin' Tonight" and "Mystery Train," she makes you not just hear but, more importantly, *feel* why all the fuss was made about this hillbilly music in the first place. (Dom Salemi)

Parallax Project – I Hate Girls (Kool Kat Musik)

Parallax Project honcho Mike Giblin has played with quite a few bands and artists over the years, ranging from the Harrisburg, PA-based garage band Stump Wizards, who joined forces with Radio Birdman guitarist Deniz Tek to form Deep Reduction, to power poppers Dan Kibler and Steve Ward, who, like Giblin, is a former member of the excellent combo Cherry Twister. In more recent years, Mike G. has fronted Parallax Project, whom I first caught last year as the opening act for Magic



Christian on their East Coast tours. One of the highlights of their live shows was bringing MC bassist/Plimsouls guitarist Eddie Munoz on stage to do a short set with them, which struck me a match made in Heaven. Parallax Project's music is very similar to that of The Plimsouls – heavily influenced by the Brit Invasion, Motown, and every other tuneful kind of 60s music, sounding oh-so-familiar, but ultimately a new take on hard-rocking pop music. Mike and Parallax Project's latest release, *I Hate Girls*, is their third album in the past seven years, and it's a goodun', produced by Don Dixon, yet another positive influence on the band, I'm sure. Eddie M. also plays on this album, so, needless to say, we get the occasional Plimsouls-like hooks on tunes like the opener, "All The Same." Mike G. also clearly knows his way around, especially with great melodies, as evidenced by "Suddenly California" and the title track, as well as a great cover of the Motown gem "Needle In A Haystack." (Note: As an added bonus, if you order this CD from Ray Gianchetti of Kool Kat Musik, you also get a free eleven-cut CD of Mike & Co. covering an array of tunes, ranging from Little Bobby Parker's "Watch Your Step" (this cover and a take on The Who's "It's Not True," featuring Magic Christian backing Mike) to The Vapors' "News At Ten," XTC's "Life Begins at the Hop," The Kinks' "A Well Respected Man," The Jam's "Liza Radley," and

others.) All in all, one of the better releases of 2009 for me. (John Oliver)

The Wildhearts – Chutzpah! (Zoom)

God knows, I love this fucking band, as well as anything and everything that their frontman and songwriter Ginger puts out. I'll also travel damn near anywhere within the Continental US to see them play live when they grace this side of the Atlantic with occasional live shows. Nonetheless, I approached this latest Wildhearts release, *Chutzpah!*, with a bit of trepidation, for two reasons. First, Ginger moved to NYC sometime last year, dried out and rehabbed through his various substance abuse issues, and appeared to actually be happy at the last couple of live shows in the Big Apple. As most of his best work in the past, lyrically speaking, seemed to dwell on a multitude of personal, turbulent issues, I wondered if his newfound happiness would adversely affect his music. Second, it appears that he had grown tired of doing all of the heavy lifting for the Wildhearts and was encouraging the other band members, notably guitarist CJ and bassist Scott Sorry, to start doing some of the lead vocals and songwriting themselves. Not sure how this would affect

the sound and/or chemistry of the band. (I had visions of that awful Creedence Clearwater Revival LP when they decided to become a democracy instead of just letting John Fogerty drive.) So how is the new release? It doesn't, to me, get off to the most promising of starts. While the lead-off track, "Jackson Whites," is primo/classic Wildhearts, the next two songs, "Plastic Jebus" and "The Only One," could be Green Day or any other bad pseudo-punk band. Inexplicably, the latter is the first single from this album – bad choice. Thankfully, the tunes get a lot better, peaking with "You Are Proof That Not All Women Are Insane," which, in my opinion, should have been the first single here. "Tim Smith," an ode to the ailing leader of The Cardiacs, "John of Violence," "Mazel Tov Cocktail," and the title track are also highlights. The Japanese version of this CD contains an additional four tracks, the best being a killer cover of Jim Carroll's "People Who Died." All in all, a very respectable outing, and if it appeals to more people than the usual Wildhearts fare, so much the better. Ginger's still writing great tunes, and Scott and CJ occasionally singing lead do not hurt the band. Still, this isn't the Wildhearts album for newbies to start with, although I'm guessing I'd appreciate most of these songs better played live. For the newcomers, please see *Earth Versus The Wildhearts* from 1994



– the perfect cross between power pop and heavy metal. (John Oliver)

Various Artists - Holy Mackerel! Pretenders to Little Richard's Throne (Ace)

Little Richard possesses one of the most dynamic voices in all of popular music. Mixing gospel intensity with a sinner's unrepentant glee, he imbued his 50s-era Specialty recordings with unbridled joy and hellbent fury that moved teen feet - both black and white - across the nation's dance floor. The result was a spate of the greatest piano-pounding, sax wailing, over-the-top rockers ever, many of which topped the pop and r&b charts.

Naturally, the Georgia Peach's success spawned many imitators and this genuinely entertaining and smartly chosen twenty-five song compilation showcases the best Little Richard tunes not actually cut by Richard Penniman. Most sides feature cats like Screamin' Joe Neal ("Rock'n'Roll Deacon"), Big Danny Oliver ("Sapphire"), H.B. Barnum ("Don't 'Cha Know"), and Young Jesse ("Hey-Bop-A-Ree-Bop") nicking a part of Richard's piano or vocal sound on some solid senders.

Yet, some amazingly accurate imitations emanate from future stars James ("Chonnie-On-Chon"), Otis Redding ("Hey Hey Baby"), Big Al Downing ("Hey Miss Lucy"), and the oft-under-rated Dee Clark ("24 Boyfriends"). Even relative unknowns - Bunker Hill ("The Girl Can't Dance"), Little Ike ("She Can Ike"), and blues great Lowell Fulson - send up the Rock Hall of Famer in high style.

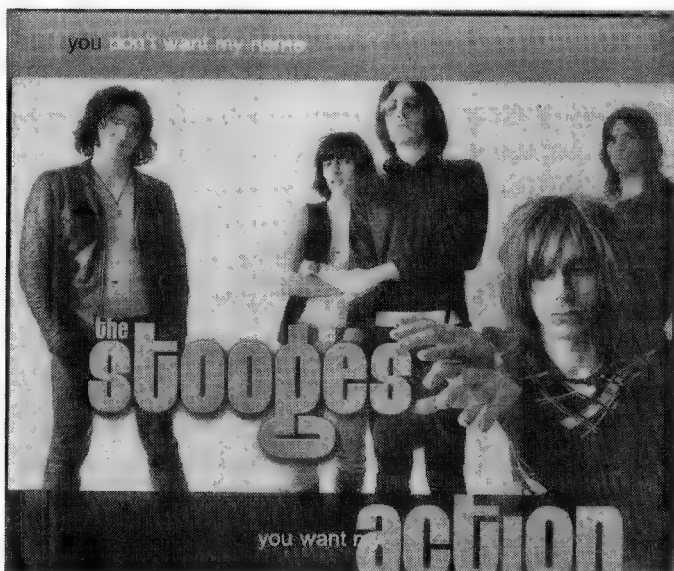
However, the final track blows them all away. On a self-imposed sabbatical in the ministry, Little Richard himself - singing uncredited with his former road band The World Famous Upsetters - nails a Fats Domino cover ("I'm In Love Again") with characteristic, ego-driven zeal. In the process, he deftly demonstrates why he was so bedrock vital to rock 'n' roll. (Ken Burke)

James Williamson & The Careless Hearts (Live 9/5/09 show and Bootleg of show)

Iggy and The Stooges (Live 11/7/09 show in San Paolo, Brazil and Bootleg of show)

The Stooges – You Want My Action (Easy Action Import)

While Stooges fans everywhere, even those who hate *The Weirdness* CD, were justifiably cursing their collective fate and shaking their fists at the heavens for Ron Asheton's sudden death earlier this year, depriving us of any more classic live shows (and make no mistake – even the squares at *Spin* magazine had sense enough to rate the reunited Stooges the number two live band in the world a couple of years ago!), a new, albeit different chapter in the band's history has now started. After Ron's passing, Iggy called ex-Stooge guitarist James Williamson (of *Raw Power* fame), to ask if he might be interested in playing again. James, who had been working at Sony in Silicon Valley as the Vice President of Technology Standards for the past several decades, already had a standing offer from a salesman at Gryphon Music, who had sold him a Martin acoustic a couple of years ago, that he could rehearse and jam with the guy's band, The Careless Hearts, if he ever wanted to play again. Mr. W. recently took him up on



the offer, just to see if he really wanted to do The Stooges thing again. Hence, we wound up with country rock band The Careless Hearts, along with Steve McKay on sax, impersonating The Stooges to put James W. through his paces for a night at the Blank Club in San Jose this past September. Yeah, it worked out very well . . . Williamson still has his chops together, as the show and subsequent YouTube videos/bootlegs show. It worked out well enough for Iggy, Scott, Mike Watt, and McKay to join forces with James for a series of live shows overseas – the first of which took place the first weekend in November, in San Paolo, Brazil. While Williamson shows some obvious rust on some tunes, does it really much matter? This isn't classical music we're talking about here. What he brings to the table is, obviously, The Stooges augmenting their set list of the past four to five years by adding songs from *Raw Power*, *Kill City*, various unrecorded demos, and Iggy solo albums, which James either played on or produced. No, JW's riffing on "I Wanna Be Your Dog," "TV Eye," "Loose," and "1970" doesn't work as well as when Ron played them, but on the other hand, it's a blast hearing "I Got A Right," "Search and Destroy," and "Raw Power!" While this isn't my favorite version of this band, with Ron gone, it'll have to do.

Meanwhile, the Easy Action label in the UK, which has put out great, great rare live material from The Stooges (the *Heavy Liquid*,

1977, and *Where The Faces Shine Volumes 1 & 2* box sets), as well as The MC5 and Sonics Rendezvous Band over the past several years, managed to scrounge up a number of live shows of perhaps the rarest version of The Stooges ever – the post *Fun House*, pre-*Raw Power* five-piece band with both Ron Asheton AND James Williamson on guitars, and Jimmy Recca on bass (along with Iggy and Scott A., of course). They found four shows that took place in April-May 1971, at the Electric Circus in NYC (two shows), St. Louis (The Factory), and Detroit (Vanity Ballroom), and put them together in a new four disk box set. While this is the rarest Stooges material ever, the bad news is – they were all cassette tapings from fans, of varying quality, with Iggy's vocals way in the back in some cases. We're talking average bootleg quality at best for most of two to three of the shows. On the other hand, the playing is so bloody ferocious that this set is a must-have for diehard Stooges fans . . . AND we're talking practically all new songs – and the band members don't remember the song titles in some cases themselves! All four sets are about forty minutes long, except the St. Louis one, cut short because Iggy accidentally cold-cocked Ron on the head with a mike. And, as per usual, Iggy's banter with the crowds between songs is worth the price of the box set itself. Not for everyone . . . but I'm enjoying the hell out of this one myself! (John Oliver)



**Idols of Perversity:
 Fantasies of Feminine
 Evil in Fin-de-Siecle
 Culture - Bram
 Dijkstra (1986/88)
 Oxford University
 Press**

In the good old days, men bent their backs out in the dirty marketplace or the mine. Women stayed home to clean, raise the kids, and wear nice duds bought with their husbands' hard-earned cash. They were protected, and men accrued status depending on how well their wives showed spending power. The sanctity of this arrangement was often immortalized in the artwork of the day.

Presumably, that's how it worked for the middle and upper classes. But with the Industrial Revolution, this idyllic arrangement was screwed. Industrialized factories made the few very rich, and the remaining breadwinners nearly obsolete. It became hard to make a buck. The artistic imagery changed, too. Instead of being immortalized as the well-dressed, saintly "angel of the house," "woman" suddenly symbolized the greedy competitor, semen-lusting ingrate.

All in all, a bad time to be female, says Bran Dijkstra in *Idols of Perversity*. By the mid-1800s, women in art, philosophy, and literature tended to be portrayed as either the incarnation of evil, the epitome of lust and selfishness, or a simpering paragon of stupidity. This viewpoint was underwritten by the unholy troika of Charles Darwin, philosopher Herbert Spencer, and the German "craniologist" Carl Vogt, who together formed a small but deadly mutual admiration society.

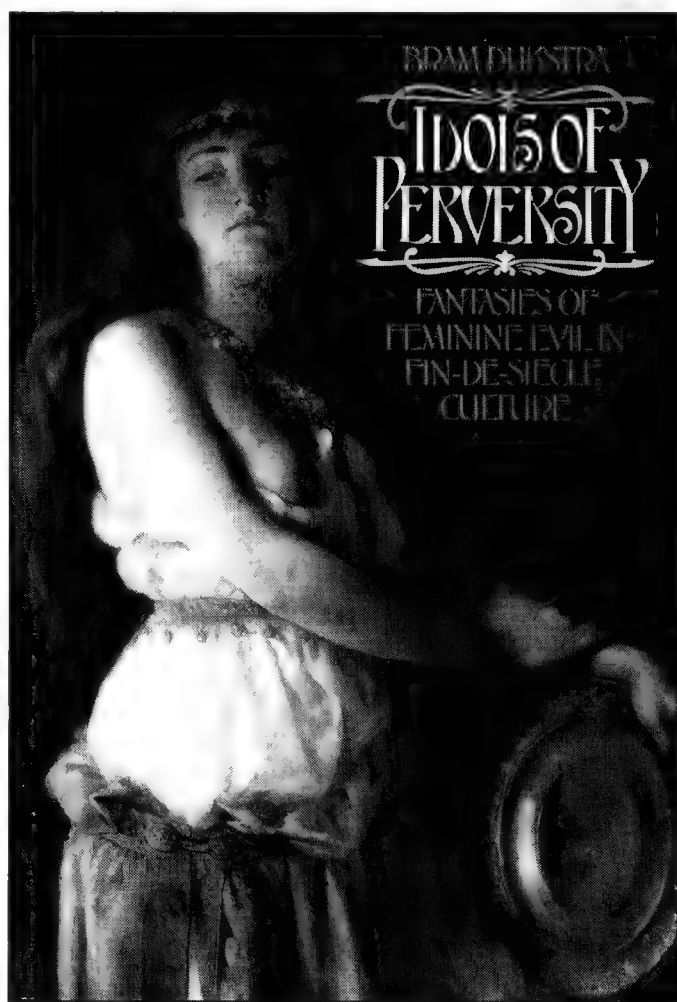
Their association was cemented by their low placement of "woman" on the evolutionary scale. Schopenhauer agreed:

"... women are directly fitted for acting as the nurses and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous, and short-sighted; in a word, they are big children all their life long - a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the full-grown man, which is Man in the strictest sense of the word."

Making the rest of us, what, big hairless house pets? All this is grist for Dijkstra's historical and cultural analysis. He indicts the aforementioned troika for gross misogyny; pokes fun at a "scientific method" that would earn almost any high school sophomore an "F." For example, early "sexologists" often quoted passages from *Nana*, Emile Zola's novel, as confirmation of their case study data. The scientists' literary equivalents were those authors who turned misogynist theorizing into models for living. The narratives of Zola, Thomas Hardy (*Jude the Obscure*), and Frank Norris (*McTeague*), to name a few, helped popularize helpful homilies like: "A woman is never raped unless she wants to be."

In the nineteenth century, it became the model to quote "scientific truth," rather than religion, to justify the oppression of weaker beings. Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, made it acceptable that the biggest (whitest, richest) guys got the cream of everything, the best food and babes, and nuts to the rest. Christian responsibility and charity suddenly seemed beside the point, unless one needed good PR. After reading *Idols of Perversity*, I understand the Republican Party a lot better.

Back to the book, Dijkstra reexamines many images of academic art that once caught the critics' eyes and set the public taste. He bravely proposes new categories for the welter of classical subject matter cluttering these canvasses. His new labels point out a concentrated campaign against women, children, and minorities, particularly Jews and Blacks. Dijkstra's titles seem wryly amusing, until one ponders what such images



must have done to the already-cloistered lives and nonexistent opportunities of nineteenth century women.

Portrayed before mid-century as homemaking nuns, women soon progressed to being painted, drawn, and sculpted as natural weaklings, as shown in the chapter titled "The Cult of Invalidism." Next, females became desperate victims spring-loaded to sacrifice themselves for a man, like the mad Lady of Shallot in "Ophelia and Folly." Now enter the cult of woman as corpse, in paintings with such coy titles as "The Dead Lady," "Dead Woman," "The Fate of Beauty," and "Study of a Dead Woman." By 1870, my personal favorite emerged: "The Collapsing Woman," a slew of works in which otherwise robust, healthy-looking females were always posed limply, draped over various items of furniture or each other, as if chronically exhausted. Early prototypes for Calvin Klein clothing ads? Nope. Those pesky artists had been reading again, and what the savants were saying was, "Guess what women are always doing in their spare time, alone or with each other?" That's right. Those flaccid lasses were simply worn out; life was one big party of nonstop masturbation, or one lesbian orgy after another.

Most women artists were as willing as their male peers to jump on the anti-woman theme. In her rosy, homey works, Mary Cassatt touts the theme of woman as big child, surrounded by children. Some did deviate from the accepted view. Ever heard of Ella Ferris Pell? At the French Salon Exhibition of 1890, her exquisitely rendered "Salome," a technically brilliant portrait of a young, strong, confident woman, human rather than female demon, "was greeted with stony silence" by critics. A colleague at that show, Juana Romani, had painted Salome in the approved, orthodox style as "a petulant, snaked-eyed, very nasty creature." Guess which painting the French government purchased for the state?

In years to come, the stylistically advanced but ideologically timed Cassatt was hailed as a revolutionary. Pell "was ignored as an artist, disowned by her relatives, and buried

in a pauper's grave."

Dijkstra scrutinizes accepted, seemingly innocuous classical images of women and minorities in nineteenth century art (remember all those slides in Art Appreciation 101?), and draws a line from them directly to Nazi Germany. In his opinion, art's visual representation of social theory added up, eventually, to sanctioned genocide. In an interesting visual procession, the reader is shown women's progression in art from household nun to invalid corpse, to broken-backed nymph posed for "therapeutic rape" (another delightful philosophic concept), to poisonous flower, finally metamorphosing to snake, sphinx, and vampire. The list culminates in the most popular and oft-painted image of the time, the death-dealing (and always very Jewish-looking) "Priestess of Man's Severed Head"; Salome wickedly contemplating the results of her handiwork, the pitiful corpse of a man sprawled at her feet. And then there's Judith, with that really big nail.

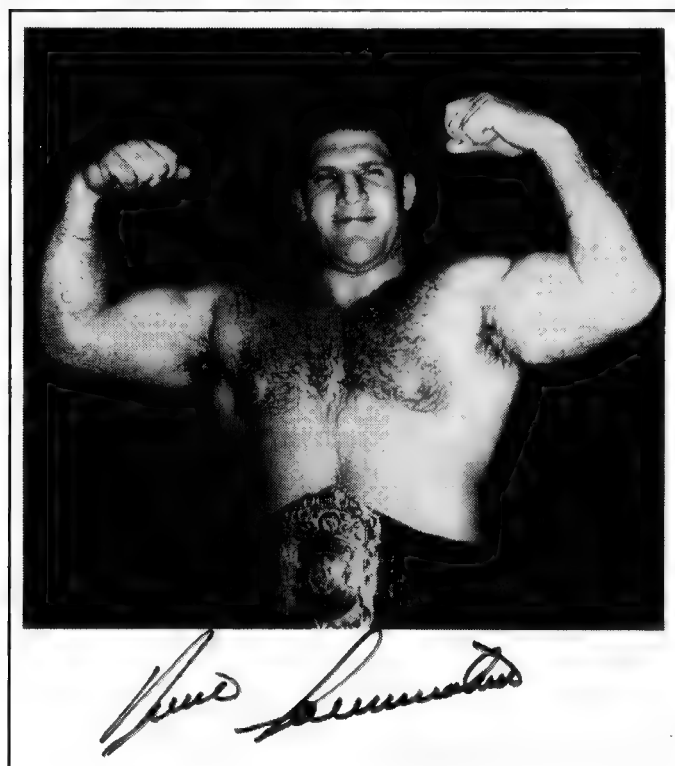
So, by linking "woman," the idol of perversity, with the "childish black man" and the "bestial Jew," did the philosophers, writers, and artists of the nineteenth century pave the way for the *Urbarmensch* of Hitler's Third Reich? Dijkstra's arguments are sometimes histrionic, occasionally overstated. Still, after reading *Idols* and viewing the three hundred or so reproductions of often bizarre paintings, drawings, and sculpture that back him up, I'm almost convinced. I might burn my old art history textbooks, if I hadn't already - *Gott in Himmel!* - sold them long ago to the next batch of unsuspecting freshmen. (Lenore Hart)

**Bruno Sammartino: An
Autobiography of Wrestling's
Living Legend - by Bob Michelucci
and Paul McCollough (1990/2008)
CreateSpace**

Many people, including today's younger wrestling fans, are unfamiliar with the name Bruno Sammartino, even though he was and

remains one of the most beloved personalities in the history of sports entertainment. I use the term "sports entertainment" because Bruno was a professional wrestler and, as everyone aside from psychotics and infants knows, the contests inside the squared circle are "works." That is to say, they are fixed. No wrestler will ever admit to this, of course, not if they want to continue to work in the profession. In fact, it is something of a tradition for grapplers to take to the airwaves and issue challenges to those, like myself, who claim that wrestling is not only faked, but more often than not, badly faked. These challenges are rarely accepted, which is not terribly surprising; after all, who in their right mind would willingly enter the ring to face off with a badly scarred, four-hundred-and-fifty-pound animal calling himself Abdullah the Butcher?

None of this should detract from the fact that the best wrestlers are terrific athletes who are asked to perform, night after grueling night, moves and stunts that would place even the finest legitimate sportster in the hospital. Or the morgue. Add to this, the fact that these guys and, yes, gals, while often risking life and limb, are also expected to make it look as if there is a genuine pier-six brawl taking place.



You think this is easy? Watch almost any of today's steroid abusers in the WWE, lamely trying to put their matches over, and contrast those feeble efforts with those of Bruno and his co-workers in the WWF of the 60s and early 70s (pre-Hulk Hogan), or those of Ric Flair and some of the better workers of 70s WCW. You'll quickly learn that a good physique and a willingness to take a fall or a punch is simply not enough; you need stamina, athleticism, and, it should go without saying, a helluva lot of acting ability. As to the acting bit, if you don't believe me, listen to Bruno:

"Just think, when a Broadway play is put on, the actors rehearse their lines for months before they go on stage in front of an audience. My God, if what the writers say is true [that wrestling is a work], then are the greatest actors that the human race has ever known. Every night we rehearse the equivalent of a full-length production, with different opponents in a different part of the country, and then move on to a new presentation somewhere else the next day. Give me a break, Mister Media Writer."

Bruno had all the abilities mentioned above, plus the essential quality making one a star in this sports demimondaine: *charisma* (if you guessed Italian heritage, mark it down as a nice try). During the 60s and 70s, Bruno almost single-handedly kept wrestling afloat in the northeastern circuit (an area roughly stretching from D.C. to Montreal), competing as champion of what is now the WWE, while brawling with such colorful figures as Killer Kowalski, George "The Animal" Steele, and Gorilla Monsoon, night after enervating night. So popular was Bruno, that Madison Square Garden, home to basketball's Knicks and hockey's Rangers, became known as the Mecca of Wrestling, thanks to the sellouts generated by each monthly Bruno championship match. When other circuits, moreover, needed to pump up their sagging gate, Bruno was usually there to lend a hand. And wherever he appeared - the Deep South, the Midwest, the West, overseas - Mr. Sammartino played to standing-room-only crowds. To say that for a time, Bruno Sammartino was synonymous

with professional wrestling, is not to exaggerate too terribly much.

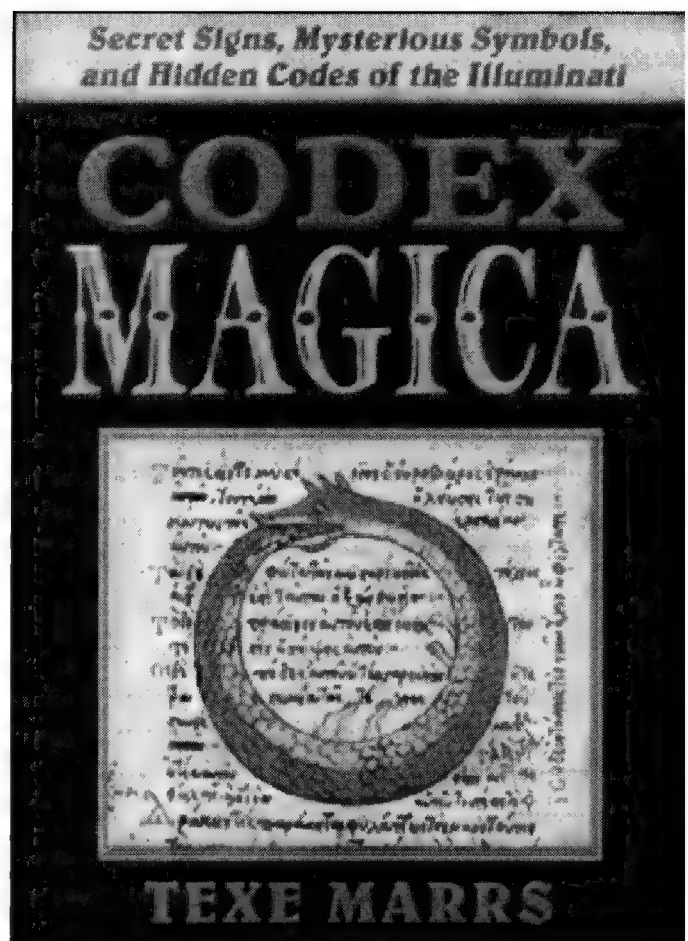
Like the man, Bruno's autobiography is a classy affair. He wastes little time or space defending himself or his profession, choosing instead to regale the reader with wonderful and sometimes harrowing anecdotes: childhood spent on the run from the Nazis; an adolescence so impoverished, it forced an aspiring mat enthusiast to wrestle an orangutan for chump change (it was a draw); a young manhood engaged in grueling and often spectacular matches with vicious men who frequently possessed a weight advantage of two hundred pounds or more. The most telling criticism is directed at Vince McMahon and his WWF (remember this is a reissue of a book written almost twenty years ago), who Bruno feels has sullied the sport, thanks to an unholy passion for buffoonery and inane melodramatics.

Now overwrought theatrics and harlequinesque characters have long played a part in wrestling, although never to the extent where, as in the WWF then, and WWE today, the mat contests were presented almost as an afterthought. Unfortunately for mat fans and even casual observers, Vince and his WWE have made billions with this approach, whilst putting all the other major circuits out of business in the process. What this has meant for the smaller circuits plying the boonies, is that they must follow suit if they wish to survive. So what we have today is wrestling that is little more than a Saturday morning cartoon show, with the few wrestlers of skill and intelligence left forced to dumb down their act, and clown for what is now an audience composed almost entirely of boorish adolescents. (Dom Salemi)

Codex Magica: Secret Signs, Mysterious Symbols, and Hidden Codes of the Illuminati - Texe Marrs (2005) RiverCrest

I do love me some conspiracy theory.

I love Alex Jones and I love David Icke. I



really love the guys who make documentaries in their living rooms about Chem-trails and the New World Order. Hell, I even love that Freeman guy, even though I am pretty sure he has some Hippie tendencies. (He sells healing crystals for the love of Pete.) Still, in my heart of hearts, there is only one. He is the Alpha and Omega of the Mysterious Them. He is Texe Marrs.

Texe Marrs is a preacher in Austin, Texas. I first saw Texe on a Burnt conspiracy DVD I bought off of eBay. It was a big lot of random goodness, and I was just like a kid at Christmas throwing one in after the other, just reveling in the paranoia. It might have been *Masonic Lodge over Jerusalem*, or maybe *Is the Pope Catholic?* (the answer was no), I am not sure. It is hard to say.

You see, every Texe DVD is pretty much the same thing: Texe sitting at his desk. He is a big, friendly though squirrely looking guy. He looks a lot like *Blazing Saddles*-era David Huddleston. Beside him, always, is his

stack of papers and books towering towards Heaven. As he makes his points, he grabs the top-most article to show us, the loyal viewers, his proof. And it doesn't matter if it is *Time*, *Newsweek*, or the *Weekly World News*, for all is equally valid in Texe's eyes. As long as it backs up his statement, even if it contradicts the article he showed us three points back, it's as good as Gospel.

Now, as much as Texe loves articles and books, he truly loves photographs. Symbolism that shows the evil Satanic, non-Christian NWO at work is his bag, and damned if he won't find it everywhere from hand signals to architecture. He has spent a lifetime looking for dark signs in the entrails of our society, and this book is the pinnacle of his work.

Codex Magica is broken up quite simply. You'll get a couple of brief pages on something Texe finds nefarious, then a lot of pictures showing said activity with captions describing what it is you have to look for. Everything from Masonic hand signs to Kabbalah is in this tome, and there are pictures of all the usual suspects (politicians, celebrities, Jerry Seinfeld) giving their allegiance to the Illuminati.

Freemasonry and Satanism get the lion's share of the attention. You will see lots of Masonic handshakes during meetings of heads of state. You will also see lots of Masonic poses for publicity shots, including some televangelists Texe takes particular joy in outing as Freemasons. There are also many pictures of folks giving the devil horns. There is something disheartening about seeing pictures of then-presidents flashing metal, though not in the way Texe meant.

It's a quick read, as the text pages are dwarfed by the photo pages by a ratio of at least ten to one. Still, it is a brilliant look at Texe's mind, and into the minds of a lot of the leading Conspiracy theorists that look to him for guidance, as most of these guys see Texe as the leader in occult symbolism. He appears on Alex Jones' radio show as a long-time friend, and even married Jones to his wife, so he is not some fringe figure on the scene.

Now, the only thing that might put you

off is Texe comes off a bit anti-Semitic here. When you read a book that feels the need to identify every Jew in its pages as such, you start to wonder. Hell, he even brings out the "secret" Jewishness of people I am not sure are actually Jews. And while I will never defend anti-Semitism, especially in Conspiracy theory where it lingers like a malignant cancer, I will say this in Texe's semi-defense:

Texe hates everyone.

Texe is the kinda guy who pronounces Muslim "Moosleem," and does it with a gleam in his eye. He hates Masons. He hates Catholics. He despises the Pope, and not just the creepy one we got now, but the cute, cuddly one that came before. Hell, he even thinks NASA is an evil institution full of Satanists. (Don't get him started on Jack Parsons.) It's not the Jews out to destroy us. It's EVERYONE. So keep that in mind when you read this book.

Unless you aren't gonna read it.

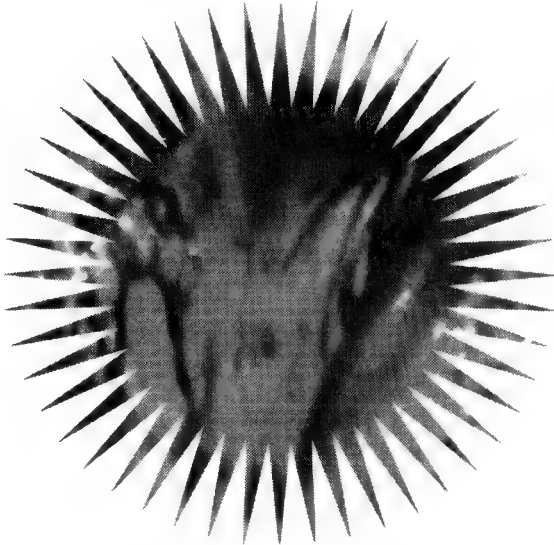
But, then again, that would be what *They'd* want you to do . . . (RR Moëre)

Flesh Inferno: Atrocities of Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition - Simon Whitechapel (2003) Creation Blood History Series

With its eccentrics, dry hilarity, and peculiar vocabulary, British humor provokes either fierce devotion or flat-out indifference. A love it or leave it phenomenon. Monty Python is the exception. Monty Python's quirky take on society is decidedly appealing to ravenous youth culture, unlike *Upstairs, Downstairs*, which never really was. On par with miniskirts, pop art, music, and tabloid news, Monty Python is one of Britain's most successful exports. In its heyday, The Fab Six were cult heroes at home and abroad. Hollywood, television, and print loved Monty Python. The last I heard, Broadway is squeezing the last laughs out of that unlikely watershed.

In the skit "The Spanish Inquisition," Monty Python pokes fun at the notorious

FLESH INFERNO



SIMON WHITECHAPEL

ATROCITIES OF TORQUEMADA
AND THE SPANISH INQUISITION

torture institution. "The Spanish Inquisition" is irreverent, quotable, and ludic. It has attained meta-comedic status, at once zany and intellectually ambitious. There is something of the mad professor in the humor of Monty Python, and that is equally true of "The Spanish Inquisition." A sly - perhaps "coy" is a better word - pedantry is at work in a routine that aims for high silliness, while harking back to the 15th century for inspiration. The chief villain of the skit is Cardinal Ximenes. I mean, really! Who has heard that name outside of the muted halls of academia? Yet there he is, the lead Inquisitor in a Monty Python sketch, draped in Popish splendor, and striking terror into English suburbia. Without handy knowledge of European history, his appearance comes off as pure nonsense - proof enough that "The Spanish Inquisition"

has history buff written all over it. One can imagine Michel Foucault taking a break from the mind-bending scholarship of *Discipline and Punish*, with a pack of Gallois and thirty minutes well spent in the company of Monty Python.

Enthusiasm aside, I have all but forgotten "The Spanish Inquisition" - a kind of heresy in itself in Monty Python circles. I am at a loss to repeat one line of the routine but for the memorable repetend: "No one expects . . ." Yes, yes. We know. We know! "No one expects the Spanish Inquisition." Apart from the obvious question, "What makes that line so amusing?" there is also the question of what does it matter? What does the Spanish Inquisition have to do with us?

In *Flesh Inferno: Atrocities of Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition*, Simon Whitechapel makes it his business to answer that exact question in a full and detailed accounting of the horrors of The Holy Office from 1478 until 1843. Let me just point out what scarcely needs pointing out, as the title alone tells us that this book is a polemic. Compared to other popular studies on the era (say, James Reston's *Dogs of God: Columbus, the Inquisition, and the Defeat of the Moors*, a work of stolid research written in a low-key style), *Flesh Inferno* is a scary book. Whitechapel intends not to merely educate, but to provoke utter disgust and, failing that, outrage. If the promise of a best seller is that the reader just can't put the book down, Whitechapel gives us the opposite; only the most hardened, cold-blooded will read this narrative without wishing to put it down. Some might go a step further and bury it in the backyard.

Whitechapel's strategy in *Flesh Inferno* is simple: scare the hell out of readers. One wonders whether he has absorbed this lesson from his sources. The Inquisition devised horrific ways to torture because it took the idea of Hell seriously. In the eyes of Tomas de Torquemada, Grand Inquisitor of Spain during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabel, compassion, grace, and Heaven were all very well and good, and the faithful would reap their reward

in the end. The heretic was made of different stuff. His lack of faith was intolerable because it mocked the very existence of Hell. No one who believed in the eternal fires would dare go astray, so the logic went, because heresy (literally meaning “to follow one’s own path”) offered certain damnation. Immolation by fire was the prelude to what awaited the faithless in the afterlife.

Relying on few references, Whitechapel shows himself all too ready to adapt to his material, slipping into the role of the Inquisitor in many instances. The effect is creepy. Consider the following:

“The torturees [sic] were told by the torturers that this pain you’re suffering now, this world-filling, world-shattering, world-annihilating agony, it’s nothing, truly nothing. It’s the whisper of a breeze, the scent of a petal, the kiss of silk compared to what awaits you if you do not repent . . . Let us hoist you again those few feet, those very few feet, and let you fall into the loving arms of Mother Church . . . Or let us slowly lower you and tenderly untie you, and begin again here and now with a new torture. Yes, a new torture. You have shown how eager you are for air . . .”

Indeed. Insidious is the word that comes to mind when considering Whitechapel’s style. He resorts to role playing because he has little confidence in the historical facts - and the facts are disturbing enough without the rose petals and silk.

Overwrought is another word that applies to *Flesh Inferno*, a forgivable sin, even with the clichés. Unfortunately, there are other clichés at work here. Whitechapel is a vehement critic of Catholicism, although *Flesh Inferno* is not a specifically anti-Catholic tract. The introduction is dizzying in the list of charges against the Jews whenever and wherever the arrogant and cruel commit atrocities in the name of a higher power. In Whitechapel’s opinion, the Jews are the root cause of everything gone wrong in Western civilization. Without Judaism, no Christianity, no Torquemada, no Hitler, so on and so forth.

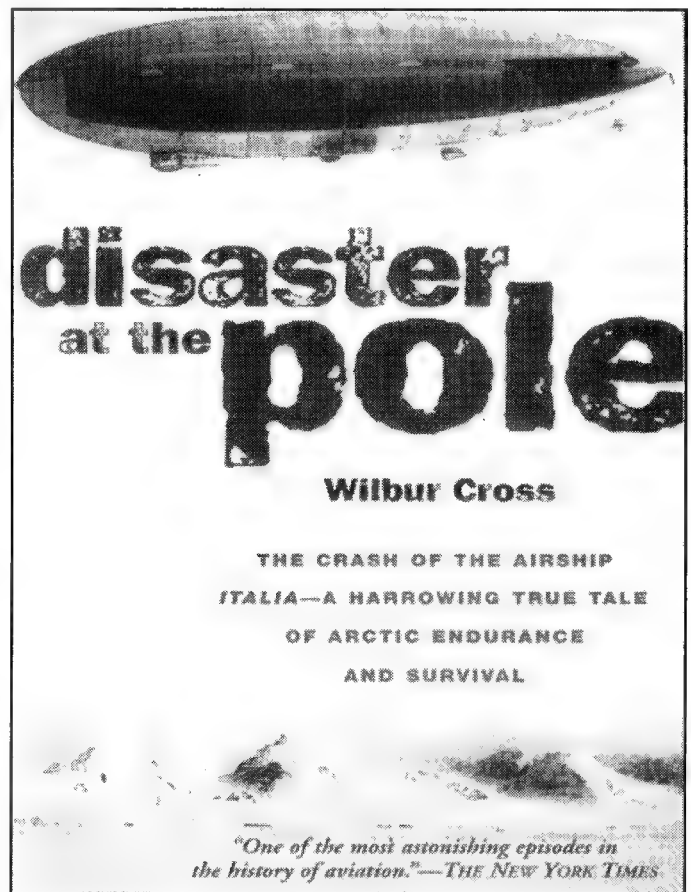
To which I can only reply: “No one deserves the Spanish Inquisition, Simon Whitechapel.

No one.” (Dr. K. A. Kopple)

Disaster at the Pole - Wilbur Cross (2000) The Lyons Press

The 1920s were a great age of adventure. In the years following World War I, flight technology that had previously been used for Zeppelin bombing raids over England, and dog fights over the trenches on the continent, were turned to more productive, peaceful uses. Airships, in particular, were seen as having tremendous potential. The great flying behemoths could transport significant crew and cargo great distances quickly, reaching remote locations inaccessible by land or sea. In *Disaster at the Pole*, Wilbur Cross draws on decades of personal research and interviews to narrate the heart-stopping drama of a little-known airborne expedition to the North Pole in 1926.

General Umberto Nobile, one of the great aeronautical engineers of the 20th century, saw airships as a way of accomplishing great



feats of exploration, and in winning worldwide acclaim for Italy. To this end, he designed the Italia, a groundbreaking, cutting-edge, semi-rigid ship, able to withstand twisting wind shear that proved so deadly to fully rigid, Zeppelin-type dirigibles. And his purpose for the Italia was as ambitious as it was audacious: fly to the North Pole and land researchers on the permanent ice pack to conduct valuable scientific experiments. Little was understood about the Arctic environment and weather conditions at the time, and any new discoveries at all were certain to earn worldwide acclaim.

Nobile was not a good fascist, however. He was interested in science and airships for their own sake, and quickly ran afoul of Mussolini's government. His initial explorations brought him international fame, but Rome reacted with only grudging acknowledgment. Early the morning of May 23, the Italia departed Kings Bay, Norway, for the Pole, reaching its destination at 12:24 a.m. on May 24. The weather proved too rough to lower the planned scientific expedition, so the airship turned back to base. In the face of the worsening storm, the Italia took a tremendous beating in sub-zero weather, and it became apparent their fuel would soon be exhausted. At 10:25 a.m., the ship began to list dangerously even as it lost altitude. The Italia hit the ice pack hard, tearing the gondola from the airbag. Half the crew was suddenly stranded on the ice, the other half carried away back into the storm, never to be seen again. And thus begins an unbelievable tale of rescue and survival in the harshest environment on earth.

Cross paints in vivid detail, the almost gleeful abandonment of Nobile to his fate by Rome, even as the other nations of the world mobilize desperate rescue missions. With limited provisions, Nobile and his surviving crew set up camp with a single tent, hoping against hope that they will be rescued. Polar bears, frigid, wet conditions, and dehydration are constant threats. Fevers and broken limbs add to the survivors' suffering, even as airplanes and ships from half a dozen nations press on with the search - an ordeal that would drag on an astounding forty-nine days before

a pitiful handful of ragged survivors were finally plucked from the disintegrating ice floe by an ancient, wheezing Russian icebreaker.

The story is made all the more immediate - and intimate - by Nobile's own words, as Cross sought out the aging aviator and other survivors to chronicle the ordeal in their own words. The heroism and daring of Nobile and crew is nothing short of inspiring, even as the idiotic and infantile actions of Mussolini and his despotic inner circle are infuriating. For such a little-known episode in the history of flight, it packs a wallop. Cross doesn't disappoint. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)

Objects of Worship - Claude Lalumière (2009) Chizine Publications

This collection contains twelve stories (two are brand new), which is only a few more than the number of anthologies Canadian writer Lalumière has edited. An illuminating introduction by professional iconoclast and World Fantasy Award-winner James Morrow points out Lalumière's "drive-driven" style (as opposed to "character-driven" or "plot-driven"), all the better to prepare the reader for these precision-crafted stories of oddball characters and their yearnings.

Lalumière mines his cheerfully admitted love for comic book heroes for stories such as "Hochelaga and Sons," about a Montreal-based superhero passing the torch to his offspring, and the apocalyptic yet muted "Destroyer of Worlds." In fact, the theme of power and responsibility is strongly felt throughout the collection. The title story depicts a world of women - no men, no mention of them - whose otherwise mundane lives revolve around satisfying the petty cravings of very small gods, sort of like lares and penates come to life. Needless to say, little good comes of this arrangement, in a world which might as well be run by cats.

Quests and questions about incomplete humanity and the nature of monsterdom swirl around the moody, phantasmagorical "The



Sea, at Bari” and “Roman Predator’s Chimeric Odyssey,” as well as “The Darkness at the Heart of the World,” with its lame protagonist who begs the gods for wings. In a similar vein, near-future “Njàbò” brings forth the spirit of Africa’s elephants, though whether for revenge or education, we never find out. The closing story, “This is the Ice Age,” with its final post-apocalyptic fugue on a world frozen under “quantum ice,” reads like a thin redux of Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*, but its imagery makes it well worth reading.

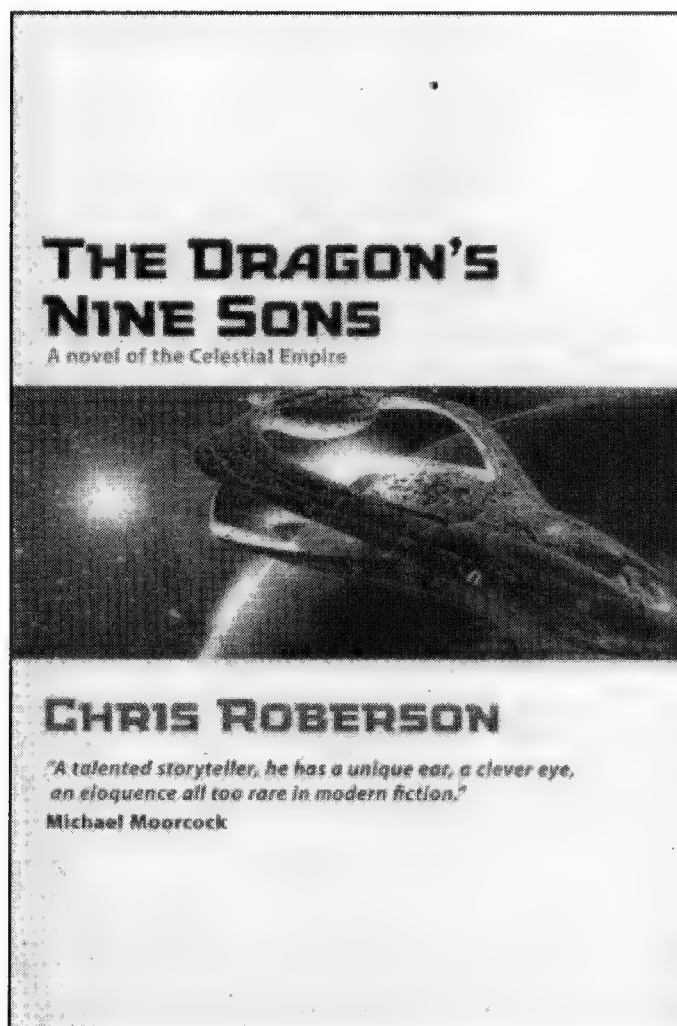
For many readers, the best-remembered stories here are likely to be the black comedies, particularly the zombie stories: the decidedly unsettling “The Ethical Treatment of Meat,” and the Twilight Zone-ish “A Visit to the Optometrist.” The blend of the mundane with the outrageous also centers “A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens” (think of the Talking

Heads’ song) when the living suddenly start receiving phone calls from very, very bored dead people.

Like everyone, Lalumière’s characters hunger, but hunger can take many forms here, from sex or physical comfort, to justice, mystic control, or tasty brains. I wouldn’t want to live in Lalumière’s world, but it’s an interesting place to visit. (Charlene Brusso)

The Dragon’s Nine Sons - Chris Roberson (2008) Solaris

The alternate history sub-genre is fraught with as much peril as possibility. Sure, the possibilities are endless when looking at “what might have been,” but all too often writers fall into the trap of playing a type of “Where’s Waldo” celebrity-spotting game. While following exploits of Teddy Roosevelt



as ringmaster for the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus in a world where Canada defeated both the U.S. and Great Britain in the War of 1812 may be amusing, ultimately they break down under the weight of their conceit. Once the novelty wears off, there's not much left that's compelling.

Which is why Chris Roberson's *Celestial Empire* stories are so distinctive and compelling in a crowded marketplace. Set in a reality where China's 15th century treasure fleets weren't dismantled, but instead expanded Imperial Chinese power across the globe, the resulting stories have a decidedly solid foundation that come off as otherworldly rather than contrived. Roberson has exploited this milieu exceptionally well, setting his various short stories and novels in different eras to keep the narrative and cast of character fresh.

In *The Dragon's Nine Sons*, Roberson produces a full-blown science fictional adventure dependent on none of the traditional sleight-of-hand that sometimes mars lesser alternate history. And indeed, this isn't alternate history at all, but rather an alternate future set in a time equivalent to our year 2052. China has expanded to become a world-spanning super power, challenged only by the vicious Mexic Dominion, a powerful Central American nation descended from the Aztec Empire. Both powers have pushed their rivalry beyond the boundaries of Earth. China has made the colonization and terraforming of Mars - known as Fire Star - a priority, while the Mexic fight a bloody war of attrition with warships striking from a secret asteroid base with an orbit that closely tracks the planet's.

Enter the titular nine sons. In a classic *Dirty Dozen*-setup, each former member of the Chinese military has been sentenced to death for some mortal infraction or other: Captain Zhuan Jie withdrew his starship from battle with Mexic forces and fled in cowardice; Bannerman Yao Guanzhong, on the other hand, pressed his inquiries too far in a quest to learn why a settlement on Fire Star was left unprotected against a murderous Mexic raid. Such sins will be forgiven and death sentences

rescinded, however, if they accept a mission that is certain suicide - to fly a captured warship into the heavily-defended Mexic-base and detonate a nuclear warhead at the heart of the asteroid.

Roberson's world building is excellent, with each new wonder hinting at a wider universe and grander history than is ever shown. It is no small compliment to say that this story could well be set thousands of years in our future, *Dune*-like, in a distant star system settled by Chinese and Latino immigrants whose evolved cultures have long since severed any connections with Earth. Roberson's writing is tight and focused, the various characters' back stories deftly intertwined with that of each other and the larger plot in general. The biggest complaint is that Roberson repeatedly deflates the escalating tension of infiltration or combat by interrupting the narrative for extended flashbacks explaining how a particular character reached this particular point.

Frustrating though that structural choice may be, it doesn't do much to detract from the gripping action of Roberson's yarn, and it's not hard to see why *The Dragon's Nine Sons* won the 2009 Sidewise Award for best alternate history. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)

The Living Dead - ed. John Joseph Adams (2008) Night Shade Books

Death sometimes lets us go gentle into that good night. He shadows us until He becomes our shadow. And, as we age, Death becomes our constant companion, whispering in our ear, even in moments of extreme joy, that our time draws near.

Zombies do not whisper, and are not so gentle. They are ravenous, revolting, in-your-face reminders that, in the final analysis, we are all food for worms. And, moreover, that Death comes for us sooner, rather than later. And that dying is not something done artfully, romantically, and/or heroically. No, death is messy, horribly messy, and terribly painful. So, zombies are the true, if sometimes

subliminal, archetype for death. An archetype that, try as we might, does not really allow us to fall half in love with easeful death.

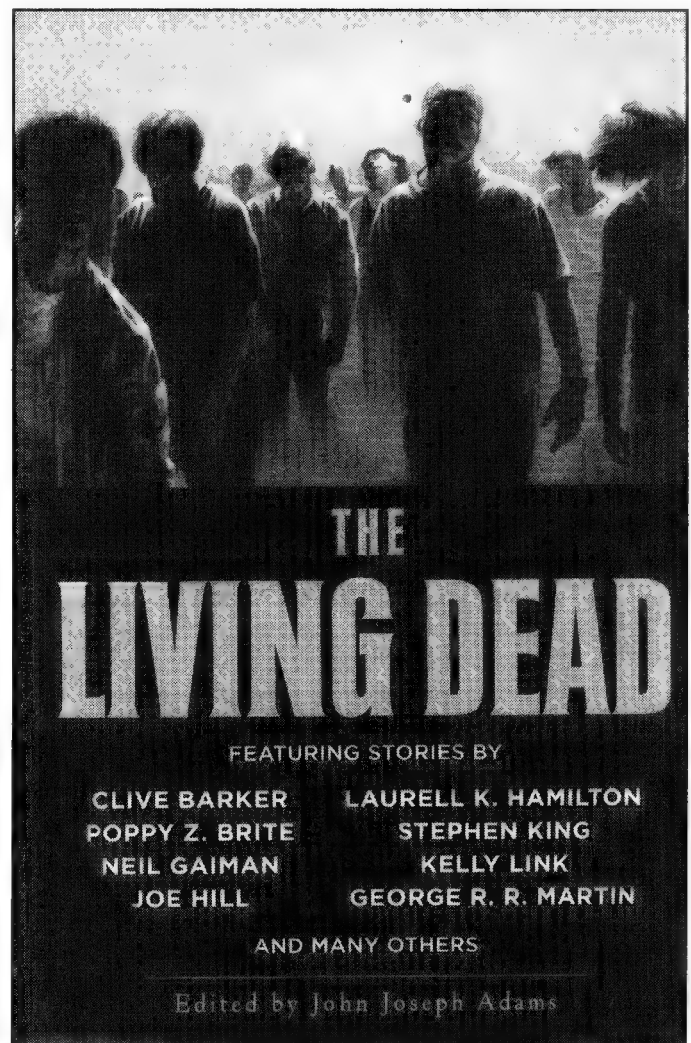
Which accounts for the zombie's enduring popularity in modern day culture. For those brave enough to face such truths, as well as death and the realities of dying, editor John Joseph Adams bestows upon us, *The Living Dead*, thirty-four of the best dead-not-dead stories of the last thirty years or so. A noted author and scholar in his own right, Adams has been able to amass quite a collection, from hitherto undiscovered gems, to award-winning works from renowned authors of horror, sci-fi, and fantasy fiction such as Stephen King, Robert Silverberg, and Dan Simmons.

Critics have given the volume a rabid going over for the paucity of tales focusing on gore and grue, and for narratives only nominally dealing with zombies. These criticisms are misguided and irrelevant. Something is either well written or it is not. That is all. If Joe Hill wants to submit a story about a failed actor running into a girlfriend on the set of a George Romero film, what of it? Besides, does anyone really want to read story after story after story rehashing *Night of the Living Dead*?

The more literate among us will be delighted to find tales *inspired* by Romero's *Living Dead*, or, as Adams notes, "a reaction to it." This means the shambling, flesh-eating zombie is treated as a concept, a trope, allowing the writers herein to use it as a springboard, a jumping off point, for their dark and sometimes twisted psyches. The award for most twisted goes to Douglas E. Winters' "Less Than Zombie," a complicated story, a universe unto itself, written in an arresting, largely experimental style, centered on the perambulations of a group of burnt-out, drugged-up twenty-somethings in a chilliastic LA, where adults are strangely absent, and zombies are forced to perform sex routines in a punk club. Poppy Z. Brite checks in with the most poetic and haunting effort, "Calcutta, Lord of Nerves," where we follow an unnamed narrator through the filthy backstreets of this Indian City as he attempts to avoid the

undead and find peace, a way of coming to grips with a world unhinged from its tether. Nancy Kilpatrick, along with a number of other contributors, gives us her take on the last-man-on-earth theme with "The Age of Sorrow," and it's a stunner: a portrait of a lonely, sensitive woman slowly going mad in a bucolic fortress she has built and carefully maintained in an isolated country village.

There really isn't a bad one in this very large bunch. Somewhat surprising, however, given the fact that this is an independent production and so a work with little commercial potential, the big names (Stephen King, Clive Barker, Dan Simmons, et al.) take very few risks here. Their efforts, while professional and engaging, are not too terribly memorable, leaving one with the sneaking suspicion that Adams included them merely in an effort to generate sales. (Dom Salemi)



Zamboni Rodeo - Jason Cohen (2001) Greystone Books

In a strange, surreal alternate reality, Texas once had more professional hockey teams than any other state in the U.S. or province in Canada. The teams played in such far-flung locales as Waco and Amarillo and El Paso, usually in converted rodeo arenas. Throngs of fans watched them play every night, erupting with glee every time a fight broke out, and local celebrities like Lance Armstrong often showed up to drop the ceremonial first puck.

Oh, wait a minute. That wasn't some random Bizarro World - it was our reality. Jason Cohen's *Zamboni Rodeo: Chasing Hockey Dreams from Austin to Albuquerque* is an engrossing attempt by one writer to capture the essence of the Texas hockey explosion of the late 1990s. The Western Professional Hockey League started in 1996 with a modest six teams in Texas and New Mexico, and ballooned to eighteen teams for the 1999-2000 season, before buying the venerable Central Hockey League, contracting, and continuing to this day with a more modest roster of teams. Latching on to one of the most successful teams in the league - off the ice, at any rate - Cohen became a virtual member of the Austin Ice Bats for the duration of the league's second season, riding along in the team's smelly bus on hellishly long road trips to places like Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Monroe, Louisiana. He shadowed the team during workouts, became a fly on the wall during the coaches' strategy sessions. In short, he made the most of almost unlimited access to a fledgling team playing a fledgling sport in a fledgling league.

The stories Cohen chronicles are priceless. During the early days of play, it was not uncommon for fans to leave early after the second period of a three-period game, assuming the first break to be "halftime." Opposing fans were merciless to opposing teams, and often backed up by local law enforcement. The El Paso Buzzards managed to grab headlines with the league's first drug scandal after two players were arrested after crossing the border

from Mexico with a car loaded with steroids.

Cohen's prose is lively and engaging, but most importantly, it is authentic. The author of this review covered the WPHL's Central Texas Stampede for its first two seasons as a beat writer. The Ice Bats and Stampede were as close to archrivals as any teams could be in the early days of the league, and the melodramatic storylines chronicled by Cohen in Austin played out with uncanny similarity just fifty miles up Interstate 35 in Belton, Texas. Young players, chasing the dream of playing pro hockey, shared bench space with grizzled veterans, who'd once tasted NHL glory but were now just barely holding on in the bush leagues to the sport they loved. One person's best friend and roommate one day could be traded away the next to a team on the schedule the very next night. All too often, management and personnel decisions were made with management ego and personal grudges in mind, rather than the best interests of the team. To see the same mistakes play out over and over is maddening. To see the players suit up night after night, over-matched and injury-riddled is inspiring.

Of the six original teams making up the WPHL, only Albuquerque survives intact to this day. Amarillo folded and was reborn. Teams in Belton, Waco, and El Paso died along the way. Even the Ice Bats - once adored by fans despite playing in a sauna-like barn that actually caused a game to be called on account of fog in the rink - have closed up shop due to the impending arrival of an AHL team to the city. The story of hockey in Texas is as hilarious as it is improbable, simultaneously inspiring and heartbreaking. The teams he wrote about may be gone, but *Zamboni Rodeo* is a fitting memorial to them. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)

**Reclaiming History: The
Assassination of President John F.
Kennedy - Vincent Bugliosi (2007)
W.W. Norton (Includes CD-Rom**

with almost one thousand pages of end notes)

Stop me if you've heard this one before.

Two conspiracy theorists (we'll call them Jim and Oliver) are on their way to Dealey Plaza to check out the Grassy Knoll. Halfway there they hit a skid, plow into a tree, and are both instantly killed. Being the decent sort, they go to Heaven and pass through the Pearly Gates. There they are given an audience with God.

Jim looks up at God and says, "God, we have spent our entire lives researching the Kennedy Assassination. Would you please tell us the truth of what happened that day?"

God looks down at the two and smiles.

He says, "It was Oswald, working alone, shooting from the Book Depository."

Jim looks at Oliver with a look of horror and says, "Man, this thing goes higher than we ever thought."

Now that I have pissed off most of you, and also stolen one of the few examples of mirth in

this behemoth of a book, let's get to the meat of the matter.

November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was shot and killed while riding in a motorcade in Dallas. That is the one thing everyone agrees on. After that, all bets are off.

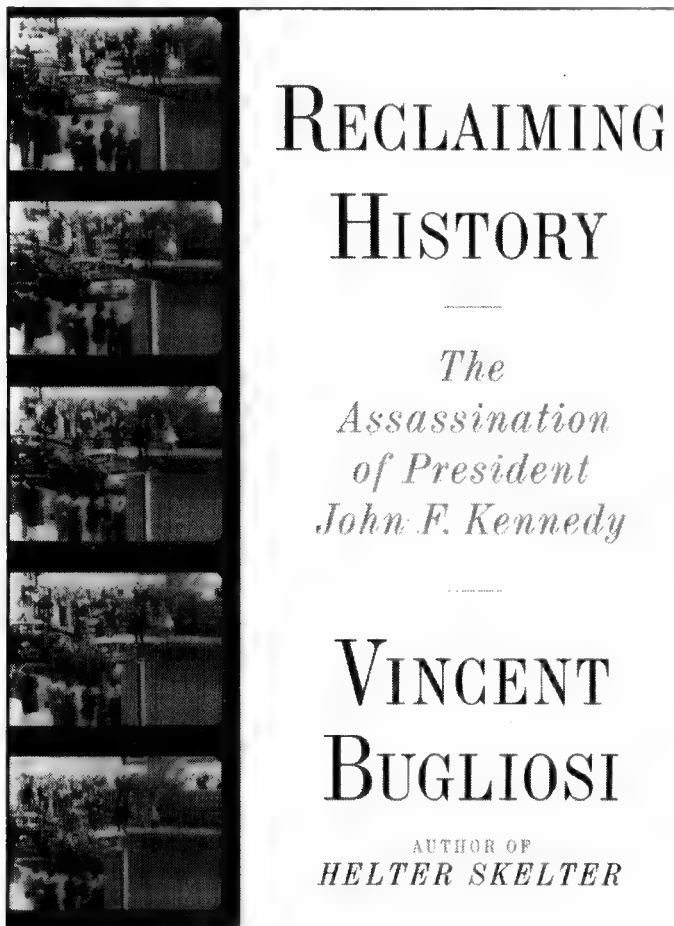
No other murder in the history of mankind has stirred up as much controversy as the killing of Kennedy. A cottage industry has arisen over the years, filled with thousands of books and theories, every one different. The only thing they have in common is the conviction that the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald was the lone killer is wrong.

Early in this decade, seventy-five percent of Americans polled said that they believed that there was a conspiracy involved in the death of JFK. I, myself, held this belief as I sized up this tome to see if I wanted to read it. Did I really want to read sixteen hundred pages (small print, mind you) defending the much maligned Warren Commission? I wasn't sure, but then I happened to catch the Oliver Stone movie on TV and felt like I should give the other side a chance to have their say.

I am very glad I did.

Bugliosi takes on the Kennedy assassination with meticulous detail. The section on the "4 Days in November," or the biography of Oswald, could have been released as books in and of themselves, they are so detailed and immense. The first nine hundred sixty-nine pages of the book are an incredibly detailed account of what happened. They are also very well documented as Bugliosi footnotes EVERYTHING, showing the world his work in a way that lets us see all his sources and judge accordingly. As good as the first part is, the true heart of *Reclaiming History* is the second part in which Bugliosi systematically takes apart every major theory with such devastating logic that those strong enough in their beliefs without throwing the book across the room might have their own "road-to-Damascus" moment.

The magic bullet becomes a whole lot less magical when you realize that Connally was NOT, in fact, directly in front of JFK. He was



down and over and, in fact, Bugliosi includes a picture from earlier that day that clearly shows that. The newspaper from across the world is not as spectacular when you take into account the time difference, and the fact that that particular paper only published a late edition. Even Fletcher Prouty becomes less impressive when you find out his links to the Liberty Lobby (serious anti-Semitic organization that denies the Holocaust), and Lyndon LaRouche (who is, well, Lyndon LaRouche). The majority of the most convincing facts are shown to be either misunderstood, or the result of shoddy (or willfully false) work by some of the early Theorists.

Mark Lane, I'm looking at you.

Even the head shot, my main reason for belief that there must have been a second shooter, is explained with such common sense my view changed. There is even a still showing the spray going forward before the head snap. And I am no weak sister that is influenced by what I read.

The only flaw in *Reclaiming History*, and it was a fatal one in terms of sales I am sure, is a fact that Bugliosi either ignorantly or willfully ignores: people want to believe in conspiracies.

As I see it, conspiracies are used like some people use their neighborhood priest. It absolves us from all of this mess. Everything would be perfect, it says, if not for Them. It doesn't matter if the Mysterious Other be Jew, Freemason, Illuminati, or, my personal fave, extra-dimensional, shape-shifting Reptilian Overlord. The message is always the same. We are not to blame. The pure essence of America is not to blame.

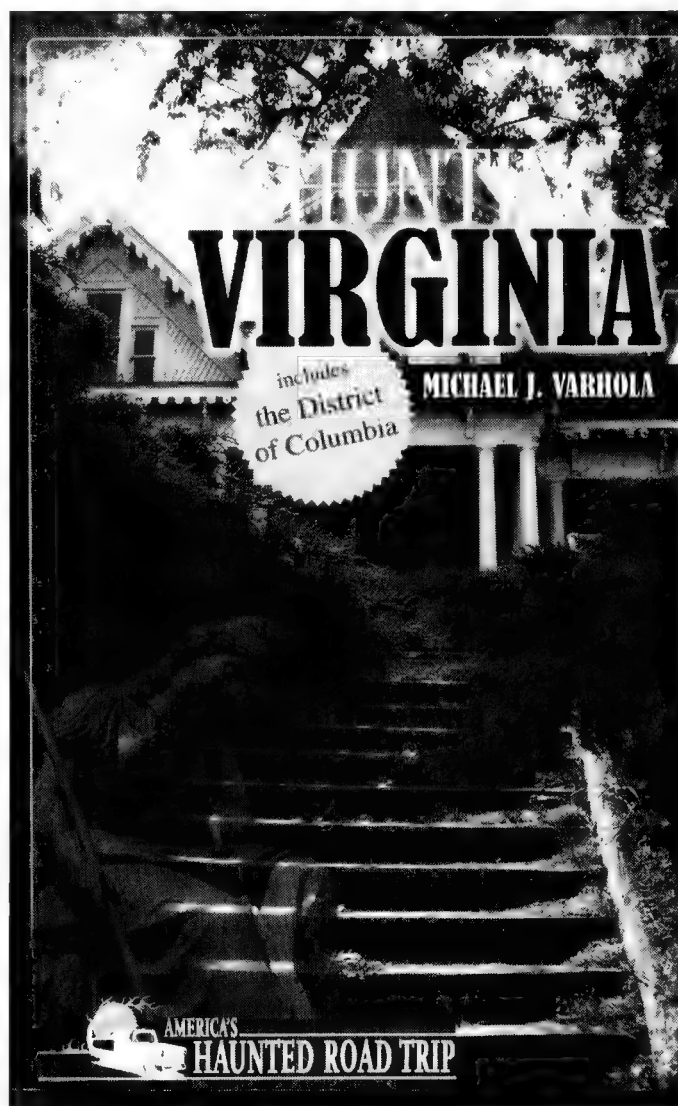
They are.

Besides, if the most powerful man in the world could be killed by some malcontented loser over something as silly as politics, then there is no Master Plan, no control. The best laid plans of man or government could be destroyed by a couple of bullets from a cheap mail-order rifle, put there almost by happenstance.

And that, my friend, is scarier than any Reptile you can think up. (RR Moore)

Ghosthunting Virginia - Michael J. Varhola (2009) Clerisy Press

Noted author and paranormal researcher, Michael J. Varhola, takes a refreshing approach to ghost chasing in *Ghosthunting Virginia*, eschewing histrionics and shock tactics, and just calling 'em the way he sees 'em. No traipsing about with thousands of dollars of electronic equipment and a posse of assistants. Armed only with a microcassette recorder, a digital camera, a flashlight, and a pen and notepad, Mr. Varhola boldly, and at times not so bravely - Michael possesses a great sense of humor - goes where few men have gone before. But wish they hadn't. That is to say, haunted highways, houses, historical sites, and eerie, blighted places well off the beaten path. As a self-professed naturalist, Varhola has not undertaken this venture to convince himself or

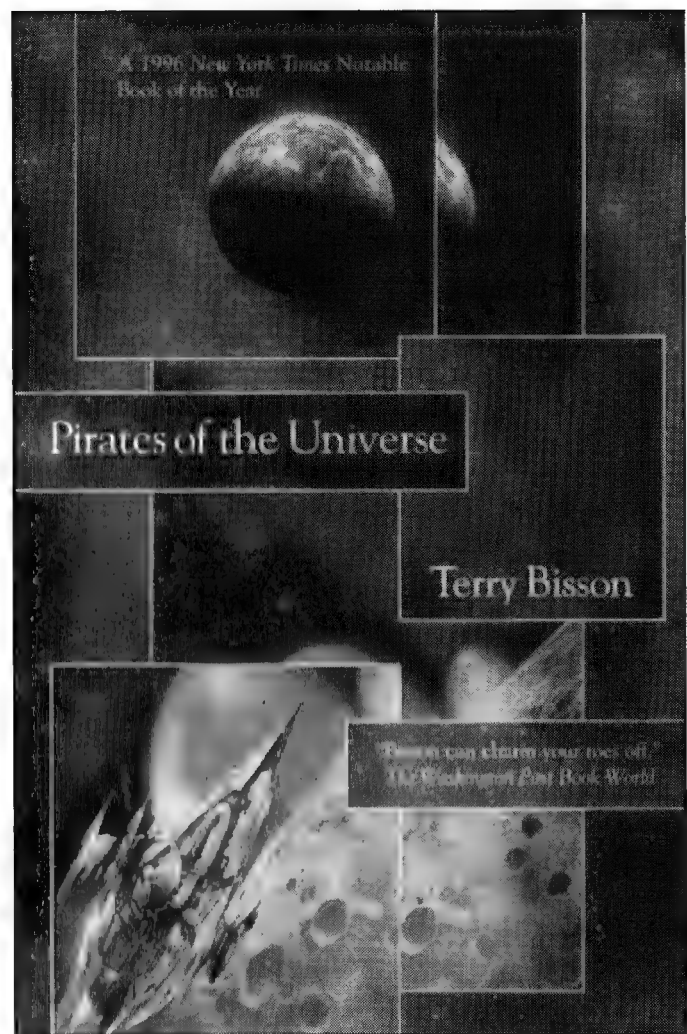


the potential reader that the sites are haunted. The goal, as explained in the introduction, is to select some of the more noteworthy locations in Virginia lore and, with that as his starting point, meld their histories, his impressions and experiences, and third-person interviews into a readable guide for both believers and skeptics alike. Thirty sites are visited - including a side trip to the District of Columbia - and while we don't meet any horror-movie type haunts, things get pretty creepy. But slowly, and oh so subtly. Deliberately adopting a congenial and conversational tone, Varhola lightly leads us into the dark with a witty aside here, a seemingly unrelated personal revelation there, until you suddenly find yourself deep inside the Devil's Den, or lost in Winchester's Union Jack Pub, or asking no one in particular out by Fairfax Station's Bunny Man Bridge, "Hey, what the hell was that . . ." (Dom Salemi)

Pirates of the Universe - Terry Bisson (1996) TOR

Terry Bisson writes with the straightest face of any writer alive. While his poker skills are unknown, when he puts words on the page all bets are off. Bisson has a singular talent for conveying the most outlandish, most absurd situations, with such a matter-of-fact quality that "suspension of disbelief" never enters into the equation. That would, you see, require the active participation of the reader. Bisson is so talented a wordsmith that disbelief is hardly a valid consideration. This ability was on display in the titular story of his short fiction collection, *Bears Discover Fire*, which might as well have been an Animal Planet documentary for all its quiet sincerity, and perhaps even moreso in his novel *Talking Man*, a surreal road trip adventure that always came across as several notches more plausible than the bizarre narrative warranted.

In *Pirates of the Universe*, Bisson turns his considerable imagination toward straightforward science fiction, leavened with considerable amounts of irony and satire. In this near-future adventure, the United States



has broken up, and the world exists in a perpetual energy crisis brought about by the accidental destruction of global oil reserves by genetically engineered microbes. The real power in this future rests with colossal multinational conglomerates, such as Disney-Windows, which protect their profit margins through a combination of 1930s-era corporate town operations and Byzantine customer service bureaucracy.

Into this dystopian setting is Gunter Glenn, a Space Ranger who crews a fast-moving attack ship that hunts the strange, 1,200-kilometer-wide extradimensional aliens commonly known as "Petey's." The tenuous skins of the Petey's can be harvested and cured into a substance far more valuable than gold, and Gunter needs only two more successful hunts before he can cash in and retire to Disney-Windows' virtual reality Pirates of the Universe theme community. Needless to

say, things go horribly wrong when a ship in Gunter's hunting squadron crashes into a Petey and is destroyed. During the subsequent inquest, Gunter finds his bank accounts and Ranger privileges suspended, his flight status revoked. To make matters worse, his elder brother, a convicted terrorist, has escaped from prison, and Gunter finds himself drawn deeper and deeper into a strange conspiracy that may or may not be a figment of the virtual reality programs he takes refuge in.

Throughout the book, Bisson pulls out various science fictional tropes and turns them on their collective ear, for great effect. The mysterious Tangle, a colony of nanobots run amuck on an abandoned orbital amusement park, conflates non-Euclidean space and the much-ballyhooed Singularity concept in a unique and thought-provoking way. The harvesting of old oil from auto junk yards is presented as a fine and honorable career, while "wing meat" derived from bats is a stable food in a war-ravaged America devoid of birds. And throughout it all, virtual reality is a continuing presence, taunting the reader with the possibility that maybe, perhaps, none of this is real and Bisson is playing out an elaborate joke.

Alternately wry and melancholy, *Pirates of the Universe* is never dull. Sexy, intelligent, and above all, fun, those readers late to the Bisson party could do far worse than to start here. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)

The Mercury 13 - Martha Ackmann (2003) Random House

When it comes to the space race, very little has been left uncovered. Blockbuster movies like *Apollo 13* and *The Right Stuff*, plus the HBO miniseries *From the Earth to the Moon* have documented the U.S. push into orbit and beyond with lavish attention. Rare is the astronaut who hasn't published a detailed memoir, and some - like Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins - have published multiple volumes, achieving a transcendent eloquence. On the other side, writers such as James



Oberg have pulled back the Iron Curtain and exposed all manner of secrets from the Russian perspective. But rarely, if ever, are America's pioneering women astronauts even acknowledged.

In *The Mercury 13*, author Martha Ackermann tells the heartbreaking story of thirteen ambitious female pilots who risked everything for a chance to contribute to the space race, only to face ridicule, discrimination, and even divorce for their efforts. Ackermann lays out in a clear, unadorned manner how the legendary Lovelace Foundation - the New Mexico-based medical research institution that devised and conducted the famous tests for the Mercury 7 and subsequent astronaut classes for NASA - realized that, from a medical point of view, women might make ideal candidates for space travel. Led by Doctor Randy Lovelace and Colonel Don

Flickinger, the foundation quickly realized some benefits were obvious in the numbers alone. Being smaller and lighter than men, on average, women would be less difficult to put into orbit, leaving more cargo capacity. They also required proportionally less food, water, and oxygen - more space and weight-saving advantages. The problem was that very little comprehensive medical research had ever been conducted on women, and there was no hard data to evaluate.

The Lovelace Foundation tackled the problem head-on, recruiting thirteen of the most accomplished women pilots in America to undergo the same testing as male astronauts. Jerri Cobb, a phenomenal pilot who flew hazardous solo missions through the Amazon rain forest, was the first recruit, undergoing tests in secret to see if such comparisons to men were even viable. When her physical results not only matched, but exceeded the scores of some of the Mercury astronauts, Cobb began recruiting more women for the program. From the start, the women were told the program wasn't officially sanctioned by NASA, but with the prestige of the Lovelace Foundation behind them, there was a prevailing hope that outstanding results would help open the doors of the astronaut corps to women some day in the future. Alas, this type of rational thinking proved hopelessly naive. As soon as word leaked about "girl astronauts," the commander of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base forbade the use of his facilities for any further training.

Undeterred, the Lovelace Foundation continued the program in New Mexico, and the women continued to excel in the grueling

tests beyond all expectations. In fact, in the years since the Mercury astronauts had come through, the foundation had devised a sensory-deprivation test far more advanced than the men had experienced. The women, knowing that they'd have to perform twice as well as their male predecessors to get half as much credit, endured the test to the edge of madness, such was their determination.

Ultimately, all was for naught. Even as Russia claimed another victory in the space race by putting Valentina Tereshkova into orbit, sexist mockery in the American media undermined the program. Some of the women were fired from their jobs, while others dealt with husbands demanding they give up such nonsense. Even former allies, such as record-setting woman pilot Jackie Cochran, turned against the Mercury 13 program when they failed to make the cut for inclusion. Finally, after a congressional hearing that was little more than show, President Lyndon Johnson came down against the research and the program was shuttered.

The Mercury 13 chronicles one of the unsung tragedies of American history, a moment when ego and arrogance undercut what could have become a ground-breaking event both for women's rights and space exploration. Instead, it would be another twenty years before Sally Ride broke the gender barrier for U.S. space flight - an event that offered belated vindication for the forgotten Mercury 13 veterans. Ackermann's book should be essential reading for all American space buffs, a bittersweet look at opportunity lost, and a tantalizing hint of what could have been. (Jayme Lynn Blaschke)





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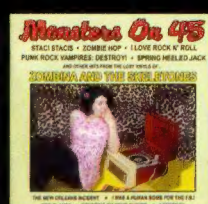
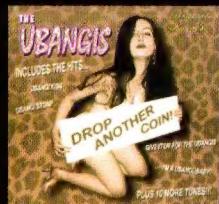
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